

THE

EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. *The situation of Colosse.*

Colossæ, or, as it is written in many manuscripts, *Colasse*, was a celebrated city of Phrygia, in Asia Minor. See the map prefixed to the Notes on the Acts of the Apostles. It was in the southern part of that province, was nearly directly east of Ephesus, north of Laodicea, and nearly west of Antioch in Pisidia. It is mentioned by Herodotus (Polyhymn. Lib. viii. c. 30) as "a great city of Phrygia, in that part where the river Lycus descends into a chasm of the earth and disappears, but which, after a distance of five stadia, rises again and flows into the Meander"—*ἐς τὸν Μαιανδρὸν*. Xenophon also mentions the city of Colosse as being *Πολὺς οἰκουμένη ὑδαϊσμων καὶ μεγάλη*—"a city well inhabited, pleasant, and large." Exped. Cyr. Lib. i. In the time of Strabo, however, it seems to have been much diminished in size, as it is mentioned by him among the "smaller towns"—*πλίσματα*. Lib. xii. p. 864. In the latter part of the reign of Nero, and not long after this epistle was written, Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, were at the same time overwhelmed by an earthquake. Pliny, Hist. Nat. Lib. v. c. 41. Colosse recovered, however, from this shock, and is mentioned by the Byzantine writers as among the most opulent cities; see Koppe, *Proleg.* The ancient town is now extinct, but its site is occupied by a village called *Chonos*, or *Khonas*. This village is described by Mr. Arundell as being situated most picturesquely under the immense range of Mount Cadmus, which rises to a very lofty and perpendicular height behind the village, in some parts clothed with pines, in others bare of soil, with vast chasms and caverns. An immense perpendicular chasm, affords an outlet to a wide mountain torrent, the bed of which is dry in summer. The approach to the village is as wild as the village itself is beautiful, abounding in tall trees, from which vines of most luxuriant growth are suspended. In the immediate neighbourhood are several vestiges of an ancient city, consisting of arches, vaults, squared stones, while the ground is strewn with broken pottery, which so generally and so remarkably indicates the site of ancient towns in the East. That these ruins are all that now remain of Colosse, there seems no reason to doubt.

Colosse, as has been remarked, was situated in Phrygia. On the name Phrygia, and the origin of the Phrygians, very different opinions have been entertained, which it is not necessary to specify in order to an understanding of this epistle. They claimed to be the most ancient people of the world; and it is said that this claim was admitted by the Egyptians, who, though boastful of their own antiquity, were content to regard themselves as second to the Phrygians. *Pict. Bib.* Like other parts of Asia Minor which were distinguished as provinces under the Roman empire, Phrygia is first historically known as a kingdom, and continued such until it was made a province of the Lydian monarchy. It remained a province of that monarchy until Cræsus, king of Lydia, was conquered by Cyrus of Persia, who added the Lydian kingdom to his empire. After that, Phrygia, like the rest of Asia Minor, became successively subject to the Greeks, the Romans, and the Turks. In the time when the gospel was preached there, it was subject to the Romans; it is now under the dominion of the Turks. Phrygia was anciently celebrated for its fertility; but, under the Moslem yoke, a great part of the country lies uncultivated.

2. *The establishment of the church in Colosse.*

The gospel was first preached in Phrygia by Paul and Silas, accompanied also by Timothy; Acts xv. 40, 41; xvi. 1—3, 6. It is said that they "went throughout Phrygia," which means, doubtless, that they went to the principal cities and towns; in Acts xviii. 23, it is said that Paul visited Phrygia again, after he had been to Philippi, Athens, Jerusalem, and Antioch. He "went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples." It is not, indeed, expressly said of Paul and Silas that they went to Colosse; but, as this was one of the principal cities of Phrygia, there is every reason to suppose that they preached the gospel there.

It has been doubted, however, whether Paul was ever at Colosse. It is expressly affirmed by Hug (*Intro.*), and by Koppe (*Proleg.*), that Paul had not taught at Colosse himself, and that he had no personal acquaintance with the Christians there. It has been maintained that the gospel was, probably, first preached there by Epaphras, who heard the apostle at Ephesus, and who returned and preached the gospel to his own countrymen. The opinion that Paul had not been there, and was personally unacquainted with the church, is founded on his declaration in chap. ii. 1: "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." From this it is inferred that he was neither at Colosse nor at Laodicea. Yet it may be justly doubted whether this passage will authorize this conclusion. Theodoret long since suggested that the meaning of this was—"I have not only a concern for you, but I have also great concern for those who have not seen me." Dr. Lardner, however, maintains that the gospel was preached in Colosse by Paul. The reasons which he gives for the opinion are briefly these:

(1.) The declarations of Luke, already quoted, that Paul more than once passed through Phrygia. The presumption is, that he would visit the chief cities of that province in passing and repassing through it. It is to be remembered that, according to chap. ii. 1, Colosse and *Laodicea* are placed on the same footing; and hence the difficulty of the supposition that he did not visit the former is increased. Can it be supposed that Paul would go again and again through that region, preaching the gospel in the points where it would be likely to exert the widest influence, and yet never visit either of these principal cities of the province, especially when it is remembered that Laodicea was the capital? (2.) Dr. Lardner appeals

to what Paul says in chap. i. 6, and ii. 6, 7, in proof that he knew that they had been rightly taught the gospel. From this he infers that Paul had himself communicated it to them. This conclusion is not perfectly clear, since it is certain that Paul might have known their first teachers, and been satisfied that they taught the truth; but it is such language as he would have used on the supposition that he was the spiritual father of the church. (3.) Epaphras, says Dr. Lardner, was not their first instructor in the gospel. This he infers from what is said of him in chap. i. 7, and in chap. iv. 12, 13. He is commended as "one of them," as a "fellow-servant," as "a faithful minister of Christ," as one "beloved." But he is not spoken of as sustaining any nearer relation to them. If he had been the founder of their church, he thinks it is incredible that there is no allusion to this fact in writing to them; that the apostle should have spoken more than once of him, and never referred to his agency in establishing the church there. (4.) Paul does, in effect, say that he had himself dispensed the gospel to these Colossians; chap. i. 21—25. The salutations at the end of the epistle, to various persons at Laodicea and Colosse, show that he was personally acquainted there. See these and other reasons drawn out in Lardner's Works, vol. vi., pp. 151 seq., Ed. Lond. 1829. The considerations suggested by Dr. Lardner seem to me to be sufficient to render it in the highest degree probable that the church at Colosse was founded by Paul.

§ 3. *When and where the epistle was written.*

This epistle is believed to have been written at Rome, when Paul was a prisoner there, and at about the same time that the epistle to the Ephesians, and the epistle to Philemon, were written; and that they were all sent by the same persons. It is said in the epistle itself (chap. iv. 7, 9), that it was sent by Tychicus and Onesimus, both of whom are commended as "faithful and beloved" brethren. But the epistle to the Ephesians was written at Rome (see the Intro.) and was sent by Tychicus (Eph. vi. 21); and the epistle to Philemon was sent by Onesimus. It is probable, therefore, that these persons visited Ephesus, Colosse, and the place where Philemon resided; or, rather, that Tychicus and Onesimus visited Colosse together, and that then Tychicus went to Ephesus, and Onesimus went to his former master Philemon. That this epistle and the one to Philemon were written at about the same time, is further apparent from the fact that Epaphras is mentioned in both as with the apostle, and as joining in the salutation; Col. iv. 12; Phile. 23. The epistle to the Colossians bears *internal* marks of having been written at Rome, when the apostle was a prisoner. Thus, in chap. i. 24, he says, "who now rejoice in my sufferings for you;" chap. iv. 18, "Remember my bonds." If this be so, then it is not difficult to fix the date of the epistle with some degree of accuracy. This would be about the year 62.

§ 4. *The occasion and design of the epistle.*

The general drift of this epistle has a strong resemblance to that addressed to the Ephesians, and it bears internal marks of being from the same hand. It was evidently written in view of errors which extensively prevailed among the churches of that part of Asia Minor, and was designed to inculcate the same general duties. It is of importance, therefore, to possess a general understanding of the nature of these errors, in order to a correct interpretation of the epistle.

The church at Colosse was one of a circle or group of churches, lying near each other, in Asia Minor; and it is probable that the same general views of philosophy, and the same errors, prevailed throughout the entire

region where they were situated. That group of churches embraced those at Ephesus, Laodicea, Thyatira, and, in general, those addressed in the Apocalypse as "the seven churches of Asia." From some of the notices of those churches in the New Testament, as well as from the epistle before us, we may learn what errors prevailed there in general, and against what form of error particularly the epistle to the Colossians was designed to guard.

(1.) Several classes of errorists are mentioned as existing within the limits of the "seven churches of Asia." Thus, in the church at Ephesus, "those which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Rev. ii. 2); in Smyrna, those "which say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. ii. 9); in Thyatira, "that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess" (Rev. ii. 20); in Pergamos, "them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes;" those "who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel" (Rev. ii. 14, 15). The near proximity of these churches to Colosse would render it probable that the infection of these errors might have reached that church also.

(2.) The apostle Paul, in his parting speech to the elders of the church at Ephesus, alludes to dangerous teachers to which the church there might be exposed, in such a manner as to show that there was some peculiar danger from such teachers in that community. "For I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them;" Acts xx. 29, 30. He does not specify, indeed, the kind of danger to which they would be exposed; but it is evident that the danger arose from plausible teachers of error. These were of two classes—those who would come in from abroad, implying probably that there were such teachers in the neighbouring churches; and such as would spring up among themselves.

(3.) In that vicinity there appear to have been numerous disciples of John the Baptist, retaining many Jewish prejudices and prepossessions, who would be tenacious of the observances of the Mosaic law. What were their views, is not precisely known. But it is clear that they regarded the Jewish law as still binding; that they would be rigid in its observance, and in insisting on its observance by others; that they had at best, if any, a very imperfect acquaintance with Christianity; and that they were ignorant of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, and of the fact that that had been poured out in a remarkable manner under the preaching of the apostles. Paul found a number of these disciples of John at Ephesus, who professed not to have received the Holy Ghost, and who said that they had been baptized unto John's baptism; Acts xix. 1—3. Among the most distinguished and influential of the disciples of John in that region was Apollos (Acts xviii. 24, 25), who is represented as an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures. He taught at Ephesus, but how long before he was made more fully acquainted with the gospel, is unknown. He is represented as having been zealously engaged in that work, and as being eminently successful; Acts xviii. 25. There is no reason to doubt that he contributed not a little in diffusing, in that region, the peculiar views held by those who were known as the disciples of John. What was precisely the doctrine which Apollos taught, before "the way of God was expounded more perfectly to him" (Acts xviii. 26), is not now known. There is every reason, however, to suppose that he would insist on the observance of the Jewish laws, and the customs of their nation. The opinions which would be *likely* to be defended by one in his circumstances, would be those which prevailed when John preached—when the law of Moses was considered to be in full force, and when it was necessary to observe all his institutions. The advocates for

the Jewish law among the churches would be likely to appeal with great force to the sentiments of so good and so eloquent a man as Apollos. So extensive was his influence, that Koppe supposes that the principal errors prevailing in the churches in Phrygia, which it was the design of the apostle in this epistle to correct, could be traced to the influence of the disciples of John, and especially to the teachings of this eloquent man. Proleg., p. 160.

(4.) If we look into the epistle itself, we shall be able to determine with some degree of certainty the errors which prevailed, and which it was the design of this epistle to correct, and we shall find that they correspond remarkably with what we might anticipate, from what we have seen to be the errors abounding in that region. (a) Their first danger arose from the influence of philosophy; chap. ii. 4—8. The apostle warns them to beware lest any one should “beguile them with enticing words;” he cautions them against “philosophy and vain deceit”—a philosophy that was based on the “tradition of men,” “after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Such philosophy might be expected to prevail in those cities so near to Greece, and so much imbued with the Grecian spirit, and one of the chief dangers which would beset them would arise from its prevalence. (b) A second source of danger referred to, was that arising from the influence of those who insisted on the observance of the rites and customs of the Jewish religion. This the apostle refers to in chap. ii. 16. “Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days.” These are subjects on which the Jews would insist much, and in this respect the disciples of John would be likely to sympathize entirely with them. It is evident that there were those among them who were endeavouring to enforce the observance of these things. (c) There is some evidence of the prevalence there of a philosophy more Oriental than Grecian—a philosophy that savoured of Gnosticism. This philosophy was subsequently the foundation of a large part of the errors that crept into the church. Indications of its prevalence in Colosse, occur in places like the following; chap. ii. 9—“For in him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead *bodily*,” from which it would seem probable that there were those who denied that the fulness of the Godhead dwelt *bodily* in the Lord Jesus—a favourite doctrine of the Gnostics, who maintained that the assumption of human nature by the Son of God, was *in appearance* only, and that he died on the cross only *in appearance*, and not in reality. So in chap. ii. 18, there is a reference to “a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which are not seen, and which tend vainly to puff up a fleshly mind”—a description that will apply with remarkable accuracy to the homage paid by the Gnostics to the Æons, and to the general efforts of those who held the doctrines of that philosophy to intrude into those things which are not seen, and to offer an explanation of the mode of the divine existence, and the nature of the divine agency. See Notes on the verses here referred to. It will contribute not a little to a proper understanding of this epistle, to keep these things in remembrance respecting the kind of philosophy which prevailed in the region in which Colosse was situated, and the nature of the dangers to which they were exposed.

(5.) It will be seen from these remarks, and from the epistle itself, that the difficulties in the church at Colosse did not relate to the moral and religious character of its members. There is no mention of any improper conduct, either in individuals or in the church at large, as there was in the church at Corinth; there is no intimation that they had been guilty of any sins but such as were common to all heathens before conversion. There are, indeed, intimations that they were exposed to sin, and there are solemn charges against indulgence in it. But the sins to which they

were exposed were such as prevailed in all the ancient heathen world, and doubtless such as the Gentile part of the church particularly, had been guilty of before their conversion. The following sins particularly are mentioned: "Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications, and lying;" chap. iii. 5—9. These were common sins among the heathen (comp. Notes on Rom. i.), and to a relapse into these they were particularly exposed; but it does not appear that any of the members of the church had given occasion for public reproach, or for apostolic reproof, by falling into them. As they were sins, however, in which they had formerly indulged (chap. iii. 7), and as they were therefore the more liable to fall into them again, there was abundant occasion for all the solicitude which the apostle manifests on the subject.

From the remarks now made, it is easy to see what was the *design* of the epistle to the Colossians. It was primarily to guard the church against the errors to which it was exposed from the prevalence of false philosophy, and from the influence of false teachers in religion; to assert the superior claims of Christianity over all philosophy, and its independence of the *peculiar* rites and customs of the Jewish religion.

It has been asked *why* the apostle wrote an epistle to the church at Colosse, rather than to the church in Laodicea, especially as Laodicea was the capital of Phrygia? And it has been asked also, why an epistle was addressed to that church so strikingly resembling the epistle to the Ephesians (see § 5), especially as it has been supposed that the Epistle to the Ephesians was designed to be a *circular* letter, to be read by the churches in the vicinity? The reasons why an epistle was addressed particularly to the church at Colosse, seem to have been such as the following:—

(1.) Onesimus was at that time with Paul at Rome, and was about to return to his master Philemon, at Colosse; see the Introduction to the Epistle to Philemon. It was perfectly natural that Paul should avail himself of the opportunity thus afforded him, to address a letter to the church at Colosse also.

(2.) Epaphras, a principal teacher of the church at Colosse, was also with Paul at Rome; chap. i. 7; iv. 12. He was at that time a fellow-prisoner with him (Philem. 23), and it is not improbable that it was at his solicitation particularly that this epistle was written. Paul had learned from him the state of the church at Colosse (chap. i. 6, 7), and it is not impossible, as Koppe conjectures, that he had been sent to Rome by the church to seek the counsel of the apostle in the state of things which then existed in Colosse. Epaphras was, at any rate, greatly interested in the state of things in the church, as well as in the condition of the churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis (chap. iv. 13), and nothing was more natural than that he should endeavour to induce the apostle to direct a letter that might be of benefit to them all.

(3.) A particular reason for sending this epistle appears to have been to confirm the authority of Epaphras, and to give the sanction of the apostle to the truths which he had taught. In their difficulties and dangers Epaphras had taken an important part in giving them counsel. His views might have been opposed; or his authority might have been disputed by the teachers of error there, and it was important that the apostolic sanction should be given to what he had taught. Hence the apostle speaks with so much affection of Epaphras, and so warmly of him as a faithful servant of Christ; chap. i. 7; iv. 12, 13.

(4.) It may be added, that although there is a strong resemblance between this epistle and that to the Ephesians, and although it may be regarded as probable that the epistle to the Ephesians was intended in part as a circular, yet this epistle would not have been needless. It contains many

things which are not in that epistle ; is especially adapted to the state of things in the church at Colosse, and would have the greater weight with Christians there from being specifically addressed to them. See Michaelis' Intro. to the New Testament, vol. v. 122, and Koppe, Proleg. pp. 163, 164.

§ 5. *The resemblance between this epistle and that to the Ephesians.*

Every person who has given any considerable degree of attention to this epistle, must have been struck with its remarkable similarity to the epistle to the Ephesians. That resemblance is greater by far than exists between any other two of the epistles of Paul—a resemblance not only in the general style and manner which may be expected to characterize the different productions of the same author, but extending to the course of thought ; the structure of the argument ; the particular instructions, and to some phrases which do not occur elsewhere. This similarity relates particularly to the following points :—

(1.) In the representation of the reason for which the apostle was imprisoned at Rome. This resemblance, Dr. Paley (*Horæ Paul.*) remarks, is too close to be accounted for from accident, and yet too indirect and latent to be imputed to design, and is one which cannot easily be resolved into any other source than truth. It is not found in any other of his epistles. It consists in this, that Paul in these two epistles attributes his imprisonment not to his preaching Christianity in general, but to his asserting the right of the Gentiles to be admitted into the church on an equal footing with the Jews, and without being obliged to conform themselves to the Jewish law. This was the doctrine to which he considered himself a martyr. Thus in chap. i. 24, he says, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings *for you* ;" and in chap. ii. 1, "for I would that ye knew what great conflict I have *for you*, and for them at Laodicea." That is, his conflicts and trials, his imprisonment and danger of death, had somehow come upon him in consequence of his endeavouring to spread the gospel in such places as Colosse and Laodicea. These were Gentile communities ; and the meaning is, that his trials were the result of his efforts to preach among the *Gentiles*. The same representation is made in the epistle to the Ephesians—likewise written from Rome during his imprisonment. "For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ *for you Gentiles*;" chap. iii. 1. And this coincidence is also apparent by comparing two other places in the epistles. Thus Col. iv. 3, "Praying for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the *mysteries of Christ, for which I am in bonds*." An allusion to the same "*mystery*" occurs also in the Epistle to the Ephesians. "Whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the *mystery of Christ—that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel*;" chap. iii. 4—6. In the Acts of the Apostles the same statement occurs in regard to the cause for which the apostle was persecuted and imprisoned—and it is on this coincidence, which is so evidently undesigned, that Paley has founded the argument for the genuineness of the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. *Horæ Paulinæ*. The statement in the Acts of the Apostles is, that the persecutions of Paul which led to his appeal to the Roman emperor and to his imprisonment, at Rome, were in consequence of his maintaining that the Gentiles were, in the Christian administration, to be admitted to the same privileges as the Jews, or that there was no distinction between them in the matter of salvation ; and his sufferings, therefore, were, as he says, "in behalf of the Gentiles." See, particularly, Acts xxi. 28 ; xxii. 21, 22. From these passages it appears that the offence which drew down on Paul the vengeance of his countrymen was, his mission to the *Gentiles*, and his maintaining that they were to be admitted to the privileges of salvation on the same terms as the Jews.

(2.) There is a strong resemblance between the course of thought and the general structure of the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. To an extent that does not occur in any other of Paul's epistles, the same topics are introduced, and in the same order and connection. Indeed, in some portions, they are almost identical. Particularly the *order* in which the various topics are introduced is nearly the same. The following portions of the two epistles will be seen to correspond with each other.

<i>Ephesians.</i>	<i>Colossians.</i>
i. 15—19	with i. 9—11.
i. 20—23	“ i. 15—19.
i. 10	“ i. 20.
ii. 1—10	“ i. 21—23.
iii. 7	“ i. 25.
iii. 9, 10	“ i. 26, 27.
iii. 17	“ ii. 7.
ii. 11—22	“ ii. 11—15.
iv. 14	“ ii. 8.
iv. 15, 16	“ ii. 19.
iv. 25	“ iii. 9.
iv. 22—24	“ iii. 9, 10.
iv. 32	“ iii. 12.
v. 19, 20	“ iii. 16, 17.
v. 21 ; vi. 6—9	“ iii. 18—22 ; iv. 1.
vi. 19	“ iv. 3.
v. 16	“ iv. 5.
vi. 21	“ iv. 7.

This resemblance, thus carried almost through the epistle, shows that there was a similarity of condition in the two churches in reference to the dangers to which they were exposed, the kind of philosophy which prevailed, the false teachers who might have an influence over them, and the particular duties to which it was desirable their attention should be turned. There is, indeed, some considerable variety of phraseology in the discussion of these topics, but still the resemblance is remarkable, and would indicate that the epistles were written not far from the same time, and clearly by the same person. It is remarkable, among other things, as Michaelis has observed, that it is only in these two epistles that the apostle warns his readers against *lying*; Eph. iv. 25; Col. iii. 9. Hence we may conclude that this vice was one that particularly prevailed in the region where these churches were situated, and that the members of these churches had been particularly addicted to this vice before their conversion.

§ 6. *The epistle from Laodicea*

In chap. iv. 16 of this epistle, the apostle gives this direction: “And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” The former part of this verse is clear, and the direction was given, doubtless, because the churches of Colosse and Laodicea were in the vicinity of each other, and the instructions were adapted to both churches. Doubtless the same form of philosophy prevailed, and the churches were exposed to the same errors. But it is not so clear what is meant by the “epistle from Laodicea.” The most natural and obvious interpretation would be, that Paul had sent a letter also to that church, and that he wished them to procure it and read it. But no such epistle is now extant, and, consequently, much difficulty has been felt in determining what the apostle referred to. A brief ex-

amination of the opinions entertained on the subject seems necessary in this place. They are the following :

1. It has been supposed that the reference is to a letter *sent from* the Laodiceans to Paul, proposing to him some questions which they desired him to answer, and that he now wishes the Colossians to procure that letter, in order that they might more fully understand the drift of the epistle which he now sent to them. This opinion was held by Theodoret, and has been defended by Storr, Rosenmüller, and others. But the objections to it are obvious and conclusive. (1.) It is not the fair meaning of the language used by Paul. If he had referred to a letter *to him*, he would have said so; whereas the obvious meaning of the language used is, that the Colossians were to procure a letter in the possession of the Laodiceans, in exchange for the one which they now received from Paul. The churches were to make an exchange of letters, and one church was to read that which had been addressed to the other. (2.) If the letter had been addressed *to* Paul, it was doubtless in his possession; and if he wished the church at Colosse to read it, nothing would be more natural or obvious than to send it, by Tychicus, along with the letter which he now sent. Why should he give directions to send to Laodicea to procure a copy of it? (3.) If a letter had been sent *to* him by the Laodiceans, proposing certain questions, why did he send the answer to the church at Colosse, and not to the church at Laodicea? The church at Laodicea would certainly have been the one that was entitled to the reply. There would have been a manifest impropriety in sending an epistle to one church, made up of answers to questions proposed by another, and then at the end requesting them to procure those questions, that they might understand the epistle. (4.) It may be added, that it is not necessary to suppose that there was any such epistle, in order to understand this epistle to the Colossians. This is not more difficult of interpretation than the other epistles of Paul, and does not furnish in its structure any particular evidence that it was sent in answer to inquiries which had been proposed to the author.

2. It has been supposed by some that the epistle referred to was one written to Timothy, by the apostle himself, *at* Laodicea. This opinion was defended by Theophylact. The only show of authority for it is the subscription at the end of the First Epistle to Timothy—"The first to Timothy was written from Laodicea, which is the chiefest city of Phrygia Pacatiana." But that this is erroneous, can be easily shown. (1.) The subscription to the epistle to Timothy is of no authority. (2.) If this epistle had been referred to, Paul would not have designated it in this manner. It would have been rather by mentioning the *person* to whom it was addressed, than the *place* where it was written. (3.) There is nothing in the epistle to Timothy which would throw any important light on this to the Colossians, or which would be particularly important to them as a church. It was addressed to one individual, and it contains counsels adapted to a minister of the gospel, rather than to a church.

3. Many have supposed that the "epistle from Laodicea," referred to, was one which Paul had written to the Laodiceans, partly for their use, but which was of the nature of a *circular* epistle, and that we still have it under another name. Those who hold this opinion suppose that the epistle to the Ephesians is the one referred to, and that it was, in fact, sent also to the church at Laodicea. See this question treated at length in the Introduction to the Epistle to the Ephesians § 5. The reasons for supposing that the epistle now known as the "Epistle to the Ephesians" was neither a *circular* letter, nor addressed to the church at Laodicea, are there given. But if the common reading of the text in Eph. i. 1, "the saints which are *at Ephesus*," be correct, then it is clear that *that epistle* was really sent to the church in that place. The only question, then, is, whether it is of so general a character that it might as well be sent to other churches as to that, and whether Paul actually sent it as a

circular, with a direction to different churches? Against this supposition, there are strong improbabilities. (1.) It is contrary to the usual practice of Paul. He addressed letters to particular churches and individuals; and, unless this case be one, there is no evidence that he ever adopted the practice of sending the same letter to different individuals or churches. (2.) There would have been some impropriety in it, if not dishonesty. An avowed circular letter, addressed to churches in general, or to any number whose names are enumerated, would be perfectly honest. But how would this be, if the same letter was addressed to one church, and then, with a new direction, addressed to another, with no intimation of its circular character? Would there not be a species of concealment in this which we should not expect of Paul? (3.) How happens it, if this had occurred, that all remembrance of it was forgotten? When those epistles were collected, would not the attention be called to the fact, and some record of it be found in some ancient writer? Would it fail to be adverted to that the same epistle had been found to have been addressed to different churches, with a mere change in the name?

4. There is but one other opinion which can exist on this question; and that is, that the apostle refers to some letter which had been sent to the Laodiceans, which we have not now in the New Testament. If this be so, then the reference could only be to some epistle which may be extant elsewhere, or which is now lost. There is an epistle extant which is known by the name of "St. Paul's Epistle to the Laodiceans;" but it has no well-founded claims to being a genuine epistle of Paul, and is universally regarded as a forgery. "It is," says Michaelis, "a mere rhapsody, collected from St. Paul's other epistles, and which no critic can receive as a genuine work of the apostle. It contains nothing which it was necessary for the Colossians to know, nothing which is not ten times better and more fully explained in the epistle which St. Paul sent to the Colossians; in short, nothing which could be suitable to St. Paul's design." Intro. to the New Tes. iv. 127. The Greek of this epistle may be found at length in Michaelis; and, as it may be a matter of curiosity, and will show that this cannot be the epistle referred to by Paul in Col. iv. 16, I will subjoin here a translation. It is as follows: "Paul an apostle, not of men, neither by men, but by Jesus Christ, to the brethren in Laodicea. Grace be to you, and peace, from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God in Christ always, in my prayers, that you are mindful of and are persevering in good works, waiting for the promise in the day of judgment. And let not the vain speeches of some who would conceal the truth disturb you, to turn you away from the truth of the gospel which has been preached unto you. Now God grant that all they who are of me may be borne forward to the perfection of the truth of the gospel, to perform those excellent good works which become the salvation of eternal life. And now are my bonds manifest, in which bonds I am in Christ, and at the present time; but I rejoice, for I know that this shall be for the furtherance of my salvation, which is through your prayer and the supply of the Holy Ghost, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is joy. But our Lord himself shall grant you his mercy with us, that possessing love you may be of the same mind and think the same thing. On this account, brethren, as ye have heard of the appearing of the Lord, so think and do in the fear of God, and it shall be eternal life to you, for it is God who worketh in you. Do all things without murmurings and disputings. And for the remainder, brethren, rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, and see that ye keep yourselves from all base gain of covetousness. Let all your requests be made known with boldness unto God, and be firm in the mind of Christ. And finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are holy, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, these things do. And what you have heard and received, keep in your hearts, and it shall give you peace

Salute all the brethren with an holy kiss. All the saints salute you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Cause that this epistle be read in the church of the Colossians, and do you also read the epistle from Colosse." Nothing can be plainer than that this is not such an epistle as the apostle Paul would have written; it is therefore a mere forgery. The conclusion to which we are conducted is, that the reference in Col. iv. 16, is to some epistle of Paul to the church at Laodicea which is not now extant, and that the probability is, that, having accomplished the object for which it was sent, it has been suffered to be lost. Thus, it is to be numbered with the writings of Gad, and Iddo the seer, and Nathan, and the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and the book of Jehu (1 Chron. xix. 20; 2 Chron. ix. 20; xx. 34; 1 Kings xvi. 1); works which, having accomplished the object for which they were composed, have been suffered to become extinct. Nor is there any thing improbable or absurd in the supposition that an inspired book may have been lost. There is no special sacredness in a mere *writing*, or in the fact that inspired truth was *recorded*, that makes it indispensable that it should be preserved. The *oral discourses* of the Saviour were as certainly inspired as the *writings* of Paul; and yet but a small part of what he said has been preserved; John xxi. 25. Why should there be any improbability in supposing that an inspired *book* may also have been lost? And, if it has, how does that fact weaken the evidence of the importance or the value of what we now possess? How does the fact that a large part of the sermons of the Saviour have perished, by not being recorded, diminish the value, or lessen the evidence of the divine authority, of the Sermon on the Mount?

PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

CHAPTER I.

PAUL, ^a an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother,

2 To the saints ^b and faithful

^a Ep. 1.1.

^b Ps. 16.3.

CHAPTER I.

ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER.

This chapter embraces the following topics:—

(1.) The usual salutation to the church; ver. 1, 2.

(2.) Thanks to God for what he had done for the Colossians, and for the fruits of the gospel among them; ver. 3—8.

(3.) Prayer that they might persevere in the same course, and might walk worthy of their calling; ver. 9—11.

(4.) An exhortation to render thanks to God for what he had done for them in redemption; ver. 12—14.

(5.) A statement of the exalted dignity of the Redeemer; ver. 15—18.

(6.) A statement of what he had done in the work of redemption, in making peace by the blood of his cross and reconciling the world to God; ver. 19, 20.

(7.) Through this gospel, Paul says, they had been reconciled to God, and were now brought into a state in which they might be presented as holy and unblameable in his sight; ver. 21—23.

(8.) Of this gospel, Paul says he was a minister; in preaching it he had been called to endure trials, but those trials he endured with joy; and in preaching this gospel he used the utmost diligence, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that he might present every one perfect in Christ Jesus; ver. 24—29.

1. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ*; see Notes, Rom. i. 1. ¶ *By the will of God*; Notes, 1 Cor. i. 1. ¶ *And*

brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: ^c Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 We ^d give thanks to God and

^c Ga. 1.3.

^d Ep. 1.15, 16.

Timotheus our brother. On the question why Paul associated others with him in his epistles, see Notes on 1 Cor. i. 1. There was a particular reason why Timothy should be associated with him in writing this epistle. He was a native of the region where the church was situated (Acts xvi. 1—3), and had been with Paul when he preached there, and was doubtless well known to the church there; Acts xvi. 6. It is evident, however, from the manner in which Paul mentions him here, that he did not regard him as “an apostle,” and did not wish the church at Colosse to consider him as such. It is not “Paul and Timothy, apostles of Jesus Christ,” but “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our brother*.” Paul is careful never to apply the term apostle to Timothy; Phil. i. 1. “Paul and Timotheus, *the servants* of Jesus Christ;” comp. 1 Thess. i. 1; 2 Thess. i. 1. If he had regarded Timothy as an apostle, or as having apostolic authority, it is not easy to conceive why he should not have referred to him as such in these letters to the churches. Could he have failed to see that the manner in which he referred to him was adapted to produce a very important difference in the estimate in which he and Timothy would be held by the Colossians?

2. *Grace be unto you*; see Notes, Rom. i. 7.

3. *We give thanks to God*; see Notes on the parallel place in Eph. i. 15, 16. ¶ *Praying always for you*; see Notes on Rom. i. 9; Eph. i. 16; comp. 1 Thess. i. 2.

the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love *which ye have* to all the saints ;

5 For the hope which is laid up ^a for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,

^a 2 Ti. 4. 8; 1 Pe. 1. 4. ^b ver. 23. John 15. 10.

4. *Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus.* To wit, by Epaphras, who had informed Paul of the steadfastness of their faith and love; ver. 7, 8. This does not prove that Paul had never been at Colosse, or that he did not establish the church there, for he uses a similiar expression respecting the church at Ephesus (Eph. i. 15), of which he was undoubtedly the founder. The meaning is, that he had heard of their faith *at that time*, or of their *perseverance* in faith and love. ¶ Which ye have to all the saints. In what way they had manifested this is not known. It would seem that Paul had been informed that this was a character of their piety, that they had remarkable love for all who bore the Christian name. Nothing could be more acceptable information respecting them to one who himself so ardently loved the church; and nothing could have furnished better evidence that they were influenced by the true spirit of religion; comp. 1 John iii. 14.

5. *For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.* That is, "I give thanks that there is such a hope laid up for you." The *evidence* which he had that this hope was theirs, was founded on the faith and love to the saints which he heard they had evinced. He fully believed that where there was such faith and love, there was a well-founded hope of heaven. The word "hope" here is used, as it often is, for the thing hoped for. The object of hope—to wit, eternal happiness, was reserved for them in heaven. ¶ Whereof ye heard before. When the gospel was first preached to you. You were told of the blessed rewards of a life of faith, in heaven. ¶ In the word of the truth of the gospel. In the true word of the gospel.

6 Which is come unto you, as it is in all ^b the world; and bringeth ^c forth fruit as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard ^d of it, and knew the ^e grace of God in truth.

7 As ye also learned of ^g Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

Ro. 10. 17. ^e Tit. 2. 11, 12. ^f John 4. 23. ^g Phi. 23.

6. *Which is come unto you.* It has not been confined to the Jews, or limited to the narrow country where it was first preached, but has been sent abroad to the Gentile world. The object of the apostle here seems to be, to excite in them a sense of gratitude that the gospel had been sent to them. It was owing entirely to the goodness of God in sending them the gospel, that they had this hope of eternal life. ¶ As it is in all the world. It is confined to no place or people, but is designed to be a universal religion. It offers the same blessedness in heaven to all; comp. Notes on ver. 23. ¶ And bringing forth fruit. The fruits of righteousness or good living; see Notes on 2 Cor. ix. 10. The meaning is, that the gospel was not without effect wherever it was preached. The same results were observable everywhere else as in Colosse, that it produced most salutary influences on the hearts and lives of those who received it. On the nature of the "fruits" of religion, see Notes on Gal. v. 22, 23. ¶ Since the day ye heard of it. It has constantly been producing these fruits since you first heard it preached. ¶ And knew the grace of God in truth. Since the time ye knew the true grace of God; since you became acquainted with the real benevolence which God has manifested in the gospel. The meaning is, that ever since they had heard the gospel it had been producing among them abundantly its appropriate fruit, and that the same thing had also characterized it wherever it had been dispensed.

7. *As ye also learned of Epaphras.* Epaphras was then with Paul. Phil. 23. He had probably been sent

8 Who also declared unto us your love ^a in the Spirit.

9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that

^a Ro. 15. 30.

^t Ro. 12. 2; Ep. 5. 10. 17.

^c Ps. 119. 99.

to him by the church at Colosse to consult him in reference to some matters pertaining to the church there. It is evident from this, that Epaphras was a minister of the church at Colosse, though there is no evidence, as has been often supposed, that he was the founder of the church. The apostle here says, that they had learned from Epaphras *the true nature of the gospel*, and he designs undoubtedly to confirm what he had taught them in opposition to the teachings of errorists; see the Introduction, § 4. He had doubtless conferred with Epaphras respecting the doctrines which he had taught there. ¶ *Our dear fellow-servant.* This shows that Paul had contracted a strong friendship for Epaphras. There is no reason to believe that he had known him before, but his acquaintance with him now had served to attach him strongly to him. It is possible, as has been conjectured (see the Introduction), that there was a party in the church at Colosse opposed to Epaphras and to the doctrines which he preached, and if this were so, Paul's strong expression of attachment for him would do much to silence the opposition. ¶ *Who is for you a faithful minister of Christ.* "For you," when he is with you, and in managing your interests here.

8. *Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.* The love wrought in you by the Holy Spirit. It was not mere natural affection, but love wrought in their hearts by the agency of the Holy Ghost.

9. *Do not cease to pray for you;* ver. 3. The progress which they had already made, and the love which they had shown, constituted an encouragement for prayer, and a reason why higher blessings still should be sought. We always feel stimulated and encouraged to pray for those who

ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, ^b in all ^c wisdom and spiritual understanding; ^d

10 That ye might walk ^e worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing ^f be-

^d 1 John 5. 20.

^e Phil. 1. 27.

^f 1 Th. 4. 1.

are doing well. ¶ *That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will.* They had shown by their faith and love that they were disposed to do his will, and the apostle now prays that they might be fully acquainted with what he would have them do. He offered a similar prayer in behalf of the Ephesians; see the parallel place in Eph. i. 17—19, and the Notes on those verses. ¶ *In all wisdom.* That you may be truly wise in all things; Eph. i. 17. ¶ *And spiritual understanding.* In understanding those things that pertain to the "Spirit;" that is, those things taught by the Holy Spirit, and those which he produces in the work of salvation; see Notes on 1 Cor. ii. 12, 13; comp. 1 John ii. 20; v. 20.

10. *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord.* That you may live as becomes the followers of the Lord. How this was to be done he states in this and the following verses. ¶ *Unto all pleasing.* So as to please him in all things; comp. Heb. xi. 5. ¶ *Being fruitful in every good work.* This is one way in which we are to walk worthy of the Lord, and so as to please him; see Notes on John xv. 8. ¶ *And increasing in the knowledge of God.* This is another way in which we may walk worthy of the Lord, and so as to please him. It is by endeavouring to become better acquainted with his true character. God is *pleased* with those who desire to understand what he is; what he does; what he purposes; what he commands. Hence he not only *commands* us to study his works (comp. Ps. cxi. 2), but he has made a world so beautiful as to *invite* us to contemplate his perfections as reflected in that world. All good beings desire that others should understand their character, and God delights in those who are sincerely desirous of

ing ^a fruitful in every good work, and increasing ^b in the knowledge of God ;

11 Strengthened ^c with all might,

^a John 15.8,16.

^b 2Pe.3.18.

^c Is.45.24.

according to his glorious power, unto all patience ^d and long-suffering, with joyfulness ; ^e

12 Giving thanks unto the Fa-

^d Ja.1.4.

^e Ro.5.3.

knowing what he is, and who inquire with humility and reverence into his counsels and his will. Men are often displeased when others attempt to look into their plans, for they are sensible they will not bear the light of investigation. God has no plans which would not be seen to be, in the highest degree, glorious to him.

11. *Strengthened with all might.* This was also an object of Paul's earnest prayer. He desired that they might be strengthened for the performance of duty ; to meet temptations ; and to bear up under the various trials of life. ¶ *According to his glorious power.* Not by any human means, but by the power of God. There is a manifestation of power in the spirit with which Christians are enabled to bear up under trials, which shows that it is not of human origin. It is the power which God gives them in the day of trial. This power is "glorious," or, as it is in the Greek, it is the "power of his glory." It is manifestly the power of the great and glorious God, and it tends to promote his glory, and to show forth his praise. ¶ *Unto all patience.* So that you may be enabled to bear all your trials without murmuring. It is only the power of God that can enable us to do that. ¶ *And long-suffering ;* Notes, 1 Cor. xiii. 4. ¶ *With joyfulness ;* Notes, Rom. v. 3 ; 2 Cor. vii. 4. The Syriac version, Chrysostom, and a few MSS. attach this to the following verse, and read it, "With joyfulness giving thanks to the Father," &c. The only difference is in the pointing, and either reading makes good sense.

12. *Giving thanks to the Father.* This is another mode by which we may "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (ver. 10) ; to wit, by rendering appropriate thanks to God for his mercy. The particular point which the apostle here says demanded

thanksgiving was, that they had been called from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. This had been done by the special mercy of the Father who had provided the plan of salvation, and had sent his Son to redeem them. The connection shows that the word "Father" refers, in this place, not to God as the Father of his creatures, but to the Father as distinguished from the Son. It is the "Father" who has translated us into the kingdom of the "Son." Our especial thanks are due to the "Father" in this, as he is represented as the great Author of the whole plan of salvation—as he who sent his Son to redeem us. ¶ *Who hath made us meet.* The word here used—*ἱκανός*—means properly to make sufficient, from *ἵκανός* — sufficient, abundant, much. The word conveys the idea of having sufficient or enough to accomplish anything ; see it explained in the Notes on 2 Cor. iii. 6. The verb is not elsewhere used in the New Testament. In its use here, there seems to be implied the idea of conferring the privilege or the ability to be thus made the partakers of the kingdom, and the idea also of rendering us fit for it. The sense is, he has conferred on us grace sufficient to make it proper that we should partake of the blessings of his kingdom. In regard to this "fitness" or "meetness" for that kingdom, we may remark, (1.) that it does not mean that we are rendered fit by our own merits, or by anything which we have done ; for it is expressly said that it is God who has thus rendered us "meet" for it. No one, by his own merits, ever made himself fit for heaven. His good works cannot be an equivalent for the eternal rewards of heaven ; nor is the heart when unrenewed, even in the best state, fit for the society and the employments of heaven. There is no adaptedness of such a heart, however

ther, which hath made us ^a meet to be partakers of the ^b

^a Ro. 22. 14.

^b Ac. 20. 32.

amiable and however refined, to the pure spiritual joys of the upper world. Those joys are the joys of religion, of the love of God, of pleasure in holiness; and the unrenewed heart can never be *wrought up* to a fitness to enter into those joys. Yet (2.) there is a fitness or meetness which Christians possess for heaven. It consists in two things. *First*, in their having complied with the conditions on which God promises heaven, so that, although they have no merit in themselves, and no fitness by their own works, they have that meetness which results from having complied with the terms of favour. They have truly repented of their sins, and believed in the Redeemer; and they are thus in the proper state of mind to receive the mercy of God; for, according to the terms of mercy, there is a propriety that pardon should be bestowed on the penitent, and peace on the believing. A child that is truly broken-hearted for a fault, is in a fit state of mind to be forgiven; a proud, and obstinate, and rebellious child, is not. *Secondly*, there is, *in fact*, a fitness in the Christian for the participation of the inheritance of the saints in light. He has a state of feeling that is *adapted* to that. There is a congruity between his feelings and heaven—a state of mind that can be satisfied with nothing but heaven. He has in his heart substantially the same principles which reign in heaven; and he is fitted to find happiness only in the same objects in which the inhabitants of heaven do. He loves the same God and Saviour; has pleasure in the same truths; prefers, as they do, holiness to sin; and, like the inhabitants of heaven, he would choose to seek his pleasure in holy living, rather than in the ways of vanity. His preferences are all on the side of holiness and virtue; and, with such preferences, he is fitted for the enjoyments of heaven. In character, views, feelings, and preferences, therefore, the Christian is made “fit” to

inheritance of the saints in light:

13 Who hath delivered us from

participate in the employments and joys of the saints in light. ¶ *To be partakers of the inheritance.* The privileges of religion are often represented as an *heirship*, or an *inheritance*; see Notes on Rom. viii. 17. ¶ *Of the saints in light.* Called in ver. 13, “the kingdom of his dear Son.” This is a kingdom of light, as opposed to the kingdom of darkness in which they formerly were. In the East, and particularly in Persia, there prevailed early the belief that there were two great kingdoms in the universe—that of light, and that of darkness. We find traces of this opinion in the Scriptures, where the kingdom of God is called “light,” and that of Satan is called “darkness.” These are, of course, figurative expressions; but they convey important truth. Light, in the Scriptures, is the emblem of holiness, knowledge, happiness; and all these are found in the kingdom over which God presides, and of which Christians are the heirs. Accordingly, we find the word *light* often used to describe this kingdom. Thus it is said of God, who presides over it, that he “is *light*, and in him is no darkness at all,” 1 John i. 5; of Christ, that he is “the light of man,” John i. 4; that he is “the true light,” John i. 9; that he is “the light of the world,” John viii. 12; comp. xii. 35; Luke ii. 32. The angels of that kingdom are “angels of light,” 2 Cor. xi. 14. Those who compose that kingdom on earth are “the children of light,” Luke xvi. 8; 1 Thess. v. 5. And all the descriptions of that kingdom in heaven represent it as filled with light and glory, Isa. lx. 19; Rev. xx. 23; xxii. 5.

13. *Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness.* The power exerted over us in that dark kingdom to which we formerly belonged—the kingdom of Satan. The characteristic of this empire is *darkness*—the emblem of (1.) sin; (2.) error; (3.) misery and death. Over us, by nature, these things had uncontrollable

the power of darkness, ^a and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of ¹ his dear Son ;

14 In ^b whom we have redemption | Pe. 2.9. 1 the Son of his love. b Ep. 1.7. c He. 1.3.

power ; but now we are delivered from them, and brought to the enjoyment of the privileges of those who are connected with the kingdom of light. Darkness is often used to represent the state in which men are by nature ; comp. Luke i. 79 ; Acts xxvi. 18 ; Rom. xiii. 12 ; 1 Pet. ii. 9 ; 1 John ii. 8. ¶ *And hath translated us.* 'The word here rendered "translated" is often used in the sense of removing *a people* from one country to another ; see Josephus, Ant. ix. 11. 1. It means, here, that they who are Christians have been transferred from one kingdom to another, *as if* a people were thus removed. They become subjects of a new kingdom, are under different laws, and belong to a different community. This change is made in regeneration, by which we pass from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light ; from the empire of sin, ignorance, and misery, to one of holiness, knowledge, and happiness. No change, therefore, in a man's life is so important as this ; and no words can suitably express the gratitude which they should feel who are thus transferred from the empire of darkness to that of light.

14. *In whom we have redemption ;* see this explained in the Notes on Eph. i. 7. The passage here proves that we obtain forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ ; but it does not prove that this is *all* that we obtain through that blood.

15. *Who is the image of the invisible God.* εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀσώρατου. The object here, as it is in the parallel place in Eph. i. 20—23, is to give a just view of the exaltation of the Redeemer. It is probable that, in both cases, the design is to meet some erroneous opinion on this subject that prevailed in those churches, or among those that claimed to be teachers there. See the Introduction to this epistle, and comp. the Notes on Eph. i. 20—23. For the meaning of the

tion through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins :

15 Who is the image ^c of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature :

phrase occurring here, "*the image of the invisible God*," see the Notes on Heb. i. 3, and 2 Cor. iv. 4. The meaning is, that he represents to mankind the perfections of God, as an image, figure, or drawing does the object which it is made to resemble. See the word *image*—εἰκὼν—explained in the Notes on Heb. x. 1. It properly denotes that which is a copy or delineation of a thing ; which accurately and fully represents it, in contradistinction from a rough sketch, or outline ; comp. Rom. viii. 29 ; 1 Cor. xi. 7 ; xv. 49. The meaning here is, that the being and perfections of God are accurately and fully represented by Christ. In what respects particularly he was thus a representative of God, the apostle proceeds to state in the following verses, to wit, in his creative power, in his eternal existence, in his heirship over the universe, in the fulness that dwelt in him. This cannot refer to him merely as incarnate, for some of the things affirmed of him pertained to him *before* his incarnation ; and the idea is, that *in all things* Christ fairly represents to us the divine nature and perfections. God is manifest to us through him ; 1 Tim. iii. 16. We see God in him as we see an object in that which is in all respects an exact copy of it. God is invisible. No eye has seen him, or can see him ; but in what Christ is, and has done in the works of creation and redemption, we have a fair and full representation of what God is ; see Notes on John i. 18 ; xiv. 9. ¶ *The first-born of every creature.* Among all the creatures of God, or over all his creation, occupying the rank and pre-eminence of the first-born. The first-born, or the eldest son, among the Hebrews as elsewhere, had peculiar privileges. He was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance. It has been, also, and especially in oriental countries, a common thing for the eldest son to succeed to

the estate and the title of his father. In early times, the first-born son was the officiating priest in the family, in the absence or on the death of the father. There can be no doubt that the apostle here has reference to the usual distinctions and honours conferred on the first-born, and means to say that, among all the creatures of God, Christ occupied a pre-eminence similar to that. He does not say that, in all respects, he resembled the first-born in a family; nor does he say that he himself was a creature, for the point of his comparison does not turn on these things, and what he proceeds to affirm respecting him is inconsistent with the idea of his being a created being himself. He that "created all things that are in heaven and that are in earth," was not himself created. That the apostle did not mean to represent him as a creature, is also manifest from the reason which he assigns why he is called the first-born. "He is the image of God, and the first-born of every creature, for—*ὅτι*—by him were all things created." That is, he sustains the elevated rank of the first-born, or a high eminence over the creation, because by him "all things were created in heaven and in earth." The language here used, also, does not fairly imply that he was a creature, or that he was in nature and rank one of those in relation to whom it is said he was the first-born. It is true that the word first-born—*πρωτότοκος*—properly means the first-born child of a father or mother, Matt. i. 25; Luke ii. 7; or the first-born of animals. But two things are also to be remarked in regard to the use of the word: (1.) It does not necessarily imply that any one is born afterwards in the family, for it would be used of the first-born, though an only child; and (2.) it is used to denote one who is chief, or who is highly distinguished and pre-eminent. Thus it is employed in Rom. viii. 29, "That he might be the first-born among many brethren." So, in verse 18 of this chapter, it is said that he was "the first-born from the dead;" not that he was literally the first that was raised from the dead, which was not the fact, but that he

might be pre-eminent among those that are raised; comp. Ex. iv. 22. The meaning, then, is, that Christ sustains the most exalted rank in the universe; he is pre-eminent above all others; he is at the head of all things. The expression does not mean that he was "begotten before all creatures," as it is often explained, but refers to the simple fact that he sustains the highest rank over the creation. He is the Son of God. He is the heir of all things. All other creatures are also the "offspring of God;" but he is exalted as the Son of God above all.

[This clause has been variously explained. The most commonly received, and, as we think, best supported opinion, is that which renders *πρωτοτοκος* *πασης* *κτισταις*; "begotten before all creation." This most natural and obvious sense would have been more readily admitted, had it not been supposed hostile to certain views on the sonship of Christ. Some explain *πρωτ.* actively, and render "first begotten or producer of all things," which gives, at all events, a sense consistent with truth and with the context, which immediately assigns as the reason of Christ being styled *πρωτ.*, the clause beginning *ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη*, "For by him were all things created." Others, with the author, explain the word figuratively, of pre-eminence or lordship. To this view however, there are serious objections. It seems not supported by sufficient evidence. No argument can be drawn from verse 18, until it be proved, that "firstborn from the dead," does not mean the first that was raised to die no more, which Doddridge affirms to be "the easiest, surest, most natural sense, in which the best commentators are agreed." Nor is the argument from Rom. viii. 29 satisfactory. "*Πρωτοτ.*," says Bloomfield, at the close of an admirable note on this verse, "is not well taken by Whitby and others, in a figurative sense, to denote 'Lord of all things,' since the word is never so used, except in reference to primogeniture. And although in Rom. viii. 29, we have *τον* *πρ.* *ἐν* *πολλοις* *ωδελφοις*, yet there his followers are represented not as his creatures, but as his brethren. On which, and other accounts, the interpretation, according to which we have here a strong testimony to the eternal filiation of our Saviour is greatly preferable; and it is clear that ver. 15 and 18 are illustrative of the nature, as ver. 16 and 17 are an evidence of the pre-existence and divinity of Christ."]

16. *For by him were all things created.* This is one of the reasons why

16 For by him ^a were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or

dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by ^b him, and for him:

^a John 1.3.

^b Ro. 11.36.

he is called "the image of God," and the "first-born." He makes God known to us by his creative power, and by the same power in creation shows that he is exalted over all things as the Son of God. The phrase which is here used by the apostle is universal. He does not declare that he created all things in the spiritual kingdom of God, or that he arranged the events of the gospel dispensation, as Socinians suppose (see Crellius); but that *every thing* was created by him. A similar form of expression occurs in John i. 3; see Notes on that verse. There could not possibly be a more explicit declaration that the universe was created by Christ, than this. As if the simple declaration in the most comprehensive terms were not enough, the apostle goes into a specification of things existing in heaven and earth, and so varies the statement as if to prevent the possibility of mistake. ¶ *That are in heaven.* The division of the universe into "heaven and earth" is natural and obvious, for it is the one that is *apparent*; see Gen. i. 1. *Heaven*, then, according to this division, will embrace all the universe, *except* the earth; and will include the heavenly bodies and their inhabitants, the distant worlds, as well as *heaven*, more strictly so called, where God resides. The declaration, then, is, that all things that were in the worlds above us were the work of his creative power. ¶ *And that are in earth.* All the animals, plants, minerals, waters, hidden fires, &c. Every thing which the earth contains. ¶ *Visible and invisible.* We see but a small part of the universe. The angels we cannot see. The inhabitants of distant worlds we cannot see. Nay, there are multitudes of worlds which, even with the best instruments, we cannot see. Yet all these things are said to have been created by Christ. ¶ *Whether they be thrones.* Whether those invisible things be thrones. The refer-

ence is to the ranks of angels, called here *thrones, dominions, &c.*; see Notes on Eph. i. 21. The word "*thrones*" does not occur in the parallel place in Ephesians; but there can be no doubt that the reference is to an order of angelic beings, as those to whom dominion and power were intrusted. The other orders enumerated here are also mentioned in Eph. i. 21. ¶ *All things were created by him.* The repetition, and the varied statement here, are designed to express the truth with emphasis, and so that there could not be the possibility of mistake or misapprehension; comp. Notes on John i. 1—3. The importance of the doctrine, and the fact that it was probably denied by false teachers, or that they held philosophical opinions that tended to its practical denial, are the reasons why the apostle dwells so particularly on this point. ¶ *And for him.* For his glory; for such purposes as *he* designed. There was a reference to himself in the work of creation, just as, when a man builds a house, it is with reference to some important purposes which he contemplates, pertaining to himself. The universe was built by the Creator to be his own property; to be the theatre on which he would accomplish his purposes, and display his perfections. Particularly the earth was made by the Son of God to be the place where he would become incarnate, and exhibit the wonders of redeeming love. There could not be a more positive declaration than this, that the universe was created by Christ; and, if so, he is divine. The work of creation is the exertion of the highest power of which we can form a conception, and is often appealed to in the Scriptures by God to prove that he is divine, in contradistinction from idols. If, therefore, this passage be understood literally, it settles the question about the divinity of Christ. Accordingly, Unitarians have endeavoured to show that the creation here referred to is a

17 And he is before ^a all things, and by him all things consist;
^a John i. 1.

moral creation; that it refers to the arrangement of affairs in the Christian church, or to the kingdom of God on earth, and not to the creation of the material universe. This interpretation has been adopted even by Grotius, who supposes that it refers to the arrangement by which all things are fitted up in the new creation, and by which angels and men are reconciled. By "the things in heaven and in earth," some Unitarian expositors have understood the Jews and the Gentiles, who are reconciled by the gospel; others, by the things in heaven, understand the angels, and, by the things on earth, men, who are brought into harmony by the gospel plan of salvation. But the objections to this interpretation are insuperable: (1.) The word *created* is not used in this sense properly, and cannot be. That it *may* mean to *arrange, to order*, is true; but it is not used in the sense of *reconciling*, or of bringing discordant things into harmony. To the great mass of men, who have no theory to support, it would be understood in its natural and obvious sense, as denoting the literal creation. (2.) The assertion is, that the "creative" power of Christ was exerted on "all things." It is not in reference to angels only, or to men, or to Jews, or to Gentiles; it is in relation to "*everything* in heaven and in earth;" that is, to the whole universe. Why should so universal a declaration be supposed to denote merely the intelligent creation? (3.) With what propriety, or in what tolerable sense, can the expression "things in heaven and things in earth" be applied to the Jews and Gentiles? In what sense can it be said that they are "visible and invisible?" And, if the language could be thus used, how can the fact that Christ is the means of reconciling them be a reason why he should be called "the image of the invisible God?" (4.) If it be understood of a *moral* creation, of a renovation of things, of a change of nature, how can this be applied to *the angels*? Has

Christ *created* them anew? Has he changed their nature and character? Good angels cannot need a spiritual renovation; and Christ did not come to convert fallen angels, and to bring them into harmony with the rest of the universe. (5.) The phrase here employed, of "creating all things in heaven and on earth," is *never* used elsewhere to denote a moral or spiritual creation. It appropriately expresses the creation of the universe. It is language strikingly similar to that used by Moses, Gen. i. 1; and it would be so understood by the great mass of mankind. If this be so, then Christ is divine, and we can see in this great work a good reason why he is called "the image of the invisible God," and why he is at the head of the universe—the first-born of the creation. It is because, through him, God is made known to us in the work of creation; and because, being the great agent in that work, there is a propriety that he should occupy this position at the head of all things.

17. *And he is before all things.* As he must be, if he *created* all things. Those who regard this as referring to a moral creation, interpret it as meaning that he has the *pre-eminence over* all things; not as referring to his *pre-existence*. But the fair and proper meaning of the word *before* (πρὸ) is, that he was *before* all things in the order of existence; comp. Matt. viii. 29; John xi. 55; xiii. 1; Acts v. 36; xxi. 38; 2 Cor. xii. 2. It is equivalent to saying that he was eternal—for he that had an existence *before any thing* was created, must be eternal. Thus it is equivalent to the phrase, "In the beginning;" Gen. i. 1; comp. Notes, John i. 1. ¶ *And by him all things subsist.* Or are sustained; see Notes on Heb. i. 3. The meaning is, that they are kept in the present state; their existence, order, and arrangement are continued by his power. If unsupported by him, they would fall into disorder, or sink back to nothing. If this be the proper interpretation, then it is the ascription to

18 And he is the head ^a of the body, the church; who is the beginning, ^b the first-born from the

^a Ep. 5. 23.

^b 1 Co. 15. 20.

Christ of infinite *power*—for nothing less could be sufficient to uphold the universe; and of infinite *wisdom*—for this is needed to preserve the harmonious action of the suns and systems of which it is composed. None could do this but one who is divine; and hence we see the reason why he is represented as the image of the invisible God. He is the great and glorious and ever-active agent by whom the perfections of God are made known.

18 *And he is the head of the body, the church*; Notes Eph. i. 22; v. 23. ¶ *Who is the beginning*. In all things—alike in the work of creation and in the church. He is the fountain of authority and power, and commences everything that is designed to uphold the order of the universe, and to save the world. ¶ *The first-born from the dead*. At the head of those who rise from their graves. This does not mean literally that he was the first who rose from the dead, for he himself raised up Lazarus and others, and the bodies of saints arose at his crucifixion; but it means that he had the pre-eminence among them all; he was the most illustrious of those who will be raised from the dead, and is the head over them all. Especially, he had this pre-eminence in the resurrection in this respect, that he was the first who rose from death to immortality. Others who were raised undoubtedly died again. Christ rose to die no more; see Notes on 1 Cor. xv. 20.

[And Supplementary Note on v. 15]

¶ *That in all things*. Marg., *among all*. The Greek will bear either construction, and either will accord with the scope of the apostle's remarks. If the former, it means that he is at the head of all *things*—the universe; if the latter, that he is chief among those who rose from the dead. Each of these is true, but the scope of the passage seems rather to require us to

dead; that ¹ in all *things* he might have the pre-eminence.

19 For it pleased *the Father*
1 among all.

understand this of *everything*, and to mean that all the arrangements respecting him were such as to give him supremacy over the universe. ¶ *He might have the pre-eminence*. Gr., *might be first*—*πρωτεύων*. That is, might be first in rank, dignity, honour, power. He has the pre-eminence (1) as over the universe which he has formed—as its Creator and Proprietor; (2.) as chief among those who shall rise from the dead—since he first rose to die no more, and their resurrection depends on him; (3.) as head of the church—all synods, councils, and governments being subject to him, and he alone having a right to give law to his people; and (4.) in the affections of his friends—being in their affections and confidence superior to all others.

19. *For it pleased the Father*. The words “the Father” are not in the original, but they are not improperly supplied. Some word must be understood, and as the apostle in ver. 12 referred to “the Father” as having a claim to the thanks of his people for what he had done, and as the great favour for which they ought to be thankful is that which he immediately specifies—the exaltation of Christ, it is not improper to suppose that this is the word to be understood here. The meaning is, that he chose to confer on his Son such a rank, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence, and that there might be in him “all fulness.” Hence, by his appointment, he was the agent in creation, and hence he is placed over all things as the head of the church. ¶ *That in him should all fulness dwell*. That in him there should be such dignity, authority, power, and moral excellence as to be fitted to the work of creating the world, redeeming his people, and supplying everything needful for their salvation. On the word *fulness*, see Notes on John i.

that in him ^a should all fulness dwell ;

20 And, ¹ having made ^b peace

^a John 1.16.

¹ or, making.

14. 16 ; comp Rom. xi. 12, 25 ; Gal. iv. 4 ; Eph. i. 23 ; iii. 19 ; Col. ii. 9. This is to us a most precious truth. We have a Saviour who is in no respect deficient in wisdom, power, and grace to redeem and save us. There is nothing necessary to be done in our salvation which he is not qualified to do ; there is nothing which we need to enable us to perform our duties, to meet temptation, and to bear trial, which he is not able to impart. In no situation of trouble and danger will the church find that there is a deficiency in him ; in no enterprise to which she can put her hands will there be a lack of power in her great Head to enable her to accomplish what he calls her to. We may go to him in all our troubles, weaknesses, temptations, and wants, and may be supplied from his fulness—just as, if we were thirsty, we might go to an ocean of pure water and drink.

20. *And having made peace.* Marg., *making*. The Greek will bear either. The meaning is, that by his atonement he produces reconciliation between those who were alienated from each other ; see Notes on Eph. ii. 14. It does not mean here that he had actually effected peace by his death, but that he had laid the foundation for it ; he had done that which would secure it. ¶ *By the blood of his cross.* By his blood shed on the cross. That blood, making atonement for sin, was the means of making reconciliation between God and man. On the meaning of the word *blood*, as used in this connection, see Notes on Rom. iii. 25. ¶ *By him to reconcile all things to himself.* On the meaning of the word *reconcile*, see Notes on Matt. v. 24 ; Rom. v. 10, and 2 Cor. v. 18. When it is said that “ it pleased the Father by Christ to reconcile *all things* to himself,” the declaration must be understood with some limitation. (1.) It relates only to those things which

through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself ; by him, *I say*, whether

^b Ep.2.14-16.

are in heaven and earth—for those only are specified. Nothing is said of the inhabitants of hell, whether fallen angels, or the spirits of wicked men who are there. (2.) It cannot mean that all things *are* actually reconciled—for that never has been true. Multitudes on earth have remained alienated from God, and have lived and died his enemies. (3.) It can mean then, only, that he had executed a plan that was adapted to this ; that if fairly and properly applied, the blood of the cross was fitted to secure entire reconciliation between heaven and earth. There was no enemy which it was not fitted to reconcile to God ; there was no guilt, now producing alienation, which it could not wash away. ¶ *Whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.* That is, to produce harmony between the things in heaven and in earth ; so that all things shall be reconciled to him, or so that there shall be harmony between heaven and earth. The meaning is not, that “ the things in heaven ” were alienated from God, but that there was alienation in the universe which *affected* heaven, and the object was to produce again universal concord and love. Substantially the same sentiment is found in Eph. i. 10 ; see Notes on that verse. Much has been written on the meaning of this expression, and a great variety of opinions have been entertained of it. It is best, always, unless necessity require a different interpretation, to take words in their usual signification. If that rule be adopted here, “ things in heaven ” will refer to God and the angels, and perhaps may include the principles of the divine government. “ Things on earth,” will embrace men, and the various things on earth which are now at variance with God and with heaven. Between these, it is designed to produce harmony by the blood of the cross, or by the atone-

they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

21 And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies ¹ in
¹ or, *by*.

ment. As in heaven nothing is *wrong*; as it is not desirable that anything should be changed there, all the *change* that is to take place in order to produce reconciliation, is to be on the part of men and the things of this world. The only effect of the blood of the atonement on the "things" of heaven in effecting the reconciliation is, to render it consistent for God *to be* at peace with sinners. The effect on earth is, to dispose the sinner to a willingness to be reconciled; to lead him to lay aside his enmity; to change his heart, and to effect a change in the views and principles prevailing on earth which are now at variance with God and his government. When this shall be done there will be *harmony* between heaven and earth, and an alienated world will be brought into conformity with the laws and government of the Creator.

21. *And you, that were sometime alienated.* In this work of reconciling heaven and earth, you at Colosse, who were once enemies of God, have been reached. The benefit of that great plan has been extended to you, and it has accomplished in you what it is designed to effect everywhere—to reconcile enemies to God. The word *sometime* here—*πρὸ*—means *formerly*. In common with all other men they were, by nature, in a state of enmity against God; comp. Notes on Eph. ii. 1—3. ¶ *In your mind.* It was not merely by wicked works, or by an evil life; it was alienation seated in the *mind*, and leading to wicked works. It was deliberate and purposed enmity. It was not the result of passion and excitement; it had a deeper seat, and took hold of the intellectual powers. The understanding was perverse and alienated from God, and all the powers of the soul were enlisted against him. It is this fact which renders reconciliation with God so difficult. Sin

your mind ² by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled,

22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present ^a you
² or, *in*. ^a Jude 24.

has corrupted and perverted alike the moral and the intellectual powers, and thus the whole man is arrayed against his Creator; comp. Notes on Eph. iv. 18. ¶ *By wicked works.* The alienation of the mind showed itself by wicked works, and those works were the public evidence of the alienation; comp. Eph. ii. 1, 2. ¶ *Yet now hath he reconciled.* Harmony has been secured between you and God, and you are brought to friendship and love. Such a change has been produced in you as to bring your minds into friendship with that of God. All the *change* in producing this is on the part of man, for God *cannot* change, and there is no reason why he *should*, if he could. In the work of reconciliation man lays aside his hostility to his Maker, and thus becomes his friend; see Notes, 2 Cor. v. 18.

22. *In the body of his flesh through death.* The death of his body, or his death in making an atonement, has been the means of producing this reconciliation. It (1.) removed the obstacles to reconciliation on the part of God—vindicating his truth and justice, and maintaining the principles of his government as much as if the sinner had himself suffered the penalty of the law—thus rendering it *consistent* for God to indulge the benevolence of his nature in pardoning sinners; and (2.) it was the means of bringing the sinner himself to a willingness to be reconciled—furnishing the strongest possible appeal to him; leading him to reflect on the love of his Creator, and showing him his own guilt and danger. No means ever used to produce reconciliation between two alienated parties has had so much tenderness and power as those which God has adopted in the plan of salvation; and if the dying love of the Son of God fails to lead the sinner back to God, everything else will

holy and unblameable and un-reproveable in his sight ;

23 If ye continue ^a in the faith
a He. 10. 38.

fail. The phrase "the body of his flesh" means, the *body of flesh* which he assumed in order to suffer in making an atonement. The reconciliation could not have been effected but by his assuming such a body, for his divine nature could not so suffer as to make atonement for sins. ¶ *To present you.* That is, before God. The object of the atonement was to enable him to present the redeemed to God freed from sin, and made holy in his sight. The whole work had reference to the glories of that day when the Redeemer and the redeemed will stand before God, and he shall present them to his Father as completely recovered from the ruins of the fall. ¶ *Holy.* Made holy, or made free from sin; comp. Luke xx. 38. ¶ *And unblameable.* Not that in themselves they will not be deserving of *blame*, or will not be unworthy, but that they will be purified from their sins. The word here used—*ἁμωμος*—means, properly *spotless*, ; *without blemish*; see the Notes on Eph. i. 4; v. 27; Heb. ix. 4. It is applied to a lamb, 1 Pet. i. 19; to the Saviour, Heb. ix. 14, and to the church, Eph. i. 4; v. 27; Jude 24; Rev. xiv. 5. It does not elsewhere occur. When the redeemed enter heaven, all their sins will have been taken away; not a *spot* of the deep dye of iniquity will remain on their souls; Rev. 1. 5; vii. 14. ¶ *And un-reproveable in his sight.* There will be none to *accuse* them before God; or they will be free from all *accusation*. The law will not *accuse* them—for the death of their Redeemer has done as much to honour it as their own punishment would have done; God will not *accuse* them—for he has freely forgiven them; their consciences will not *accuse* them—for their sins will all have been taken away, and they will enjoy the favour of God *as if* they had not sinned; holy angels will not *accuse* them—for they will welcome

grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and*

them to their society; and even Satan will not accuse them, for he will have seen that their piety is sincere, and that they are truly what they profess to be; comp. Notes on Rom. viii. 33, 34.

23. *If ye continue in the faith.* In the belief of the gospel, and in holy living. If this were done, they would be presented unblameable before God; if not, they would not be. The meaning is, that it will be impossible to be saved unless we continue to lead lives becoming the gospel. ¶ *Grounded.* On a firm foundation; see Notes on Eph. iii. 17, where the same word occurs. ¶ *And settled.* Gr., *firm*; as a building is that is founded on a rock; comp. Matt. vii. 25. ¶ *And be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.* By the arts of philosophy, and the allurements of sin. ¶ *Which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.* It cannot be supposed that it was literally true that every creature under heaven had actually *heard* the gospel. But this may mean, (1.) That it was *designed* to be preached to every creature, or that the commission to make it known embraced every one, and that, so far as the provisions of the gospel are concerned, it may be said that it was a system proclaimed to all mankind; see Mark xvi. 15. If a vast army, or the inhabitants of a distant province, were in rebellion against a government, and a proclamation of pardon were issued, it would not be improper to say that *it was made to every one of them*, though, as a matter of fact, it might not be true that every one in the remote parts of the army or province had actually heard of it. (2.) The gospel in the time of Paul seems to have been so extensively preached, that it might be said that it was proclaimed to every body. All known countries appear to have been visited; and so zealous and laborious had been the heralds

which was preached to ^a every creature which is under heaven ; whereof I Paul am made a minister ;

24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings
^a Mat. 24. 14 ; Mar. 16. 15.

of salvation, that it might be said that the message had been proclaimed to all the world ; see ver. 6 ; comp. Notes on Matt. xxiv. 14. ¶ *Whereof I Paul am made a minister ;* see Notes, Eph. iii. 1 — 7. Paul here pursues the same train of thought which he does in the epistle to the Ephesians, where, having shown the exalted nature of the Redeemer, and the design of the gospel, he adverts to his own labours and sufferings in making it known. The object seems to be to show that he regarded it as the highest honour to be thus intrusted with the message of mercy to mankind, and considered it as a privilege to suffer in that cause.

24. *Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you.* For you as a part of the Gentile world. It was not for the Colossians alone, but he regarded himself as suffering on account of his labours in preaching to the heathen at large. His trials at Rome had come upon him because he had maintained that the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down, and that the gospel was to be preached indiscriminately to all mankind ; see this illustrated in the Introduction, § 5. ¶ *And fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.* That which I lack of coming up to the sufferings which Christ endured in the cause of the church. The apostle seems to mean, (1.) that he suffered in the same cause as that for which Christ suffered ; (2.) that he endured the same kind of sufferings, to some extent, in reproaches, persecutions, and opposition from the world ; (3.) that he had not yet suffered *as much* as Christ did in this cause, and, though he had suffered greatly, yet there was much that was lacking to make him equal in this respect to the Saviour ; and (4.) that he felt that it was an object to be earnestly desired to be made in all

sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body's sake, which is the church ;

25 Whereof I am made a minister
^b Phi. 3. 10.

respects *just like Christ*, and that in his present circumstances he was fast filling up that which was lacking, so that he would have a more complete resemblance to him. What he says here is based on the leading desire of his soul — **TO BE JUST LIKE CHRIST** ; alike in moral character, in suffering, and in destiny ; see Notes on Phil. iii. 10. Having this strong wish, he had been led to pursue a course of life which conducted him through trials strongly resembling those which Christ himself endured ; and, as fast as possible, he was filling up that in which he now fell short. He does not mean that there was anything lacking or deficient in the sufferings which Christ endured in making an atonement which was to be supplied by his followers, so that *their* merits might be added to *his* in order to secure the salvation of men, as the Romanists seem to suppose ; but that there was still much lacking on *his* part before he should be entirely conformed to the Saviour in his sufferings, and that his present condition was such as rapidly to fill that up. This seems to me to be the fair meaning of this expression, though not the one commonly given. The usual interpretation is, "that which remains to me of affliction to be endured in the cause of Christ." But this seems to me to be cold and tame, and not to suit the genius of Paul. ¶ *In my flesh.* In bodily sufferings. ¶ *For his body's sake, which is the church ;* see Notes on Eph. i. 23.

25. *According to the dispensation of God.* The arrangement which God has made. That is, he designed that the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, and, in accordance with that arrangement, he has called me to be a minister. Notes, Eph. iii. 2. ¶ *To fulfil the word of God.* Marg., "fully to preach." The Greek is, "to fill up

ter, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, ¹ to fulfil the word of God;

26 *Even* the mystery ^a which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now ^b is made manifest to his saints:

1 or, *fully to preach.* a Ep. 3.9. b 2 Ti. 1.10.

the word of God;" the meaning is, "fully to teach and promulgate the gospel;" comp. Notes, Rom. xv. 19.

26. *Even the mystery.* To make that mystery fully known. See this explained in the Notes on Eph. iii. 2—9. The great doctrine that salvation was to be proclaimed to all mankind, Paul says, had been *concealed* for many generations. Hence it was called a *mystery*, or a hidden truth. ¶ *But now is made manifest to his saints.* It was communicated especially to the apostles who were appointed to proclaim it, and through them to all the saints. Paul says that he regarded himself as specially called to make this truth known, as far as possible, to mankind.

27. *To whom.* To the saints. ¶ *God would make known.* "Willed (Gr.) to make known;" that is, he was pleased to make this known. It was concealed in his bosom until he chose to reveal it to his apostles. It was a doctrine which the Jewish people did not understand; Eph. iii. 5, 6. ¶ *What is the riches of the glory of this mystery.* The rich glory of this great, long-concealed truth. On the use of the word *riches*, see Notes on Rom. ii. 4. It is a favourite word with the apostle Paul to denote that which is valuable, or that which *abounds*. The meaning here is, that the truth that the gospel was to be preached to all mankind, was a truth *abounding in glory*. ¶ *Among the Gentiles.* That is, the glory of this truth is manifested by the effects which it has produced among the Gentiles. ¶ *Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* Or, *Christ among you.* *Margin.* The meaning is, that the whole of that truth, so full of glory, and so rich and elevated in its effect, is summed up in this—that Christ is revealed among you as the

27 To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ ¹ in you, the ^c hope of glory:

28 Whom we preach, warning ^d every man, and teaching every 1 or, *among.* c 1 Ti. 1.1. d Ac. 20.28,31.

source of the hope of glory in a better world. This was the great truth which so animated the heart and fired the zeal of the apostle Paul. The wonderful announcement had burst on his mind like a flood of day, that the offer of salvation was not to be confined, as he had once supposed, to the Jewish people, but that all men were now placed on a level; that they had a common Saviour; that the same heaven was now opened for all, and that there were none so degraded and vile that they might not have the offer of life as well as others. This great truth Paul burned to communicate to the whole world; and for holding it, and in making it known, he had involved himself in all the difficulties which he had with his own countrymen; had suffered from want, and peril, and toil; and had finally been made a captive, and was expecting to be put to death. It was just such a truth as was fitted to fire such a mind as that of Paul, and to make it known was *worth* all the sacrifices and toils which he endured. Life is well sacrificed in making known such a doctrine to the world.

28. *Whom we preach, warning every man.* This does not mean *warning* of danger, but "*admonishing* all of the claims of the gospel to attention." Our word *warn* is commonly used in the sense of *cautioning against danger*. The Greek word here means *to put in mind; to admonish; to exhort*. The idea of the apostle is, that he made it his great business to bring the offers of the gospel fairly before the mind of every man. As it had the same claims on all; as it might be freely offered to all, and as it furnished the only hope of glory, he made it the object of his life to apprise *every man* of it, as far as he could. ¶ *And teaching every man.* Paul

"man in all wisdom; ^b that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

a 2Ti.2.25.

b 2 Co.11.2.

made it his business to *instruct* men, as well as to exhort them. Exhortation and warning are of little use where there is not sound instruction and a careful inculcation of the truth. It is one of the duties of the ministry to *instruct* men in those truths of which they were before ignorant; see Matt. xxviii. 19; 2 Tim. ii. 25. ¶ *In all wisdom*; comp. Notes on Matt. x. 16; Col. i. 9. The meaning is, that he and his fellow-labourers endeavoured to *manifest* true wisdom in the method in which they instructed others. ¶ *That we may present every man*. When we come to appear before God; Notes; 2 Cor. xi. 2. Paul was anxious that no one to whom this gospel was preached should be lost. He believed it to be adapted to save every man; and as he expected to meet all his hearers at the bar of God, his aim was to present them made perfect by means of that gospel which he preached.

29. *Whereunto I also labour*; see Notes, 1 Cor. xv. 10. ¶ *Striving. Gr. agonizing*. He taxed all his energies to accomplish this, as the wrestlers strove for the mastery in the Grecian games. ¶ *According to his working*. Not by my own strength, but by the power which God alone can give; see Notes on 1 Cor. xv. 10.

REMARKS.

Among the truths of practical importance taught by this chapter are the following:—

1. We should rejoice in the piety of others; ver. 2—8. It should be to us a subject of unfeigned gratitude to God, when others are faithful to their high calling, and when they so live as to adorn the blessed gospel. In all their faith, and love, and joy, we should find occasion for thankfulness to God. We should not envy it, or be disposed to charge it to wrong motives, or suspect it of insincerity or hypocrisy; but should welcome every account of the zeal and faithfulness of those who bear the Christian name—

29 Whereunto ^c I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

c 1 Co.15.10.

no matter who the persons are, or with what denomination of Christians they may be connected. Especially is this true in relation to our friends, or to those for whose salvation we have laboured. The source of highest gratitude to a Christian, in relation to his friends, should be, that they act as becomes the friends of God; the purest joy that can swell the bosom of a minister of Christ, is produced by the evidence that they to whom he has ministered are advancing in knowledge and love.

2. We should earnestly pray that they who have been much favoured should be prospered more and more; ver. 9-11.

3. It is a good time to pray for Christians when they are already prosperous, and are distinguished for zeal and love; ver. 9—11. We have then *encouragement* to do it. We feel that our prayers will not be in vain. For a man that is doing well, we feel encouraged to pray that he may do still better. For a Christian who has true spiritual joy, we are encouraged to pray that he may have more joy. For one who is aiming to make advances in the knowledge of God, we are encouraged to pray that he may make still higher advances; and if, therefore, we *wish* others to pray for us, we should show them by our efforts that there is some encouragement for them to do it.

4. Let us cherish with suitable gratitude the remembrance of the goodness of God, who has translated us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son; ver. 12, 13. By nature we, like others, were under the power of darkness. In that kingdom of sin, and error, and misery, we were born and reared, until God, in great compassion, brought us out from it, and made us heirs of light. Now, if we are true Christians, we belong to a kingdom of holiness, and knowledge, and happiness. No words can express appropriately the goodness of God in thus making us heirs

of light ; and not an hour of our lives should pass without a thoughtful remembrance of his mercy.

5. In the affections of our hearts let the Saviour in all things have the pre-eminence ; ver. 15—18. He is the image of God ; and when we think of him, we see what God is—how holy, pure, benevolent. He is the first-born of all things ; the Son of God ; exalted to the highest seat in the universe. When we look on the sun, moon, and stars, let us remember that he created them all. When we think of the angels, let us remember that they are the workmanship of his hands. When we look on the earth—the floods, the rivers, the hills, let us remember that all these were made by his power. The vast universe is still sustained by him. Its beautiful order and harmony are preserved by him ; and all its movements are under his control. So the church is under him. It is subject to his command ; receives its laws from his lips, and is bound to do his will. Over all councils and synods ; over all rule and authority in the church, Christ is the Head ; and whatever may be ordained by man, his will is to be obeyed. So, when we think of the resurrection, Christ is *chief*. He first rose to return to death no more ; he rose as the pledge that his people should also rise. As Christ is thus head over all things, so let him be first in the affections of our hearts ; as it is designed that in every thing he shall have the pre-eminence, so let him have the pre-eminence in the affections of our souls. None should be loved by us as Christ is loved ; and no friend, however dear, should be allowed to displace him from the supremacy in our affections.

6. In all our wants let us go to Christ ; ver. 19, “ It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.” We have not a want which he cannot supply ; there is not a sorrow of our lives in which he cannot comfort us ; not a temptation from which he cannot deliver us ; not a pain which he cannot relieve, or enable us to bear. Every necessity of body or mind he can supply ; and we

never can go to him, in any circumstance of life in which we can possibly be placed, where we shall fail of consolation and support *because* Christ is not able to help us. True piety learns day by day to live more by simple dependence on the Saviour. As we advance in holiness, we become more and more sensible of our weakness and insufficiency, and more and more disposed to live by the faith of the Son of God.”

7. By religion we become united with the angels ; ver. 20. Harmony is produced between heaven and earth. Alienated worlds are reconciled again, and from jarring elements there is rearing one great and harmonious empire. The work of the atonement is designed to remove what separated earth from heaven ; men from angels ; man from God. The redeemed have substantially the same feelings now, which they have who are around the throne of God ; and though we are far inferior to them in rank, yet we shall be united with them in affection and purpose, for ever and ever. What a glorious work is that of the gospel ! It reconciles and harmonizes distant worlds, and produces concord and love in millions of hearts which *but* for that would have been alienated for ever.

8. By religion we become fitted for heaven ; ver. 12, 22. We are made “ meet ” to enter there ; we shall be presented there unblamable and unprovable. No one will accuse us before the throne of God. Nor Satan, nor our own consciences nor our fellow-men will then urge that we *ought not* to be admitted to heaven. Redeemed and pardoned, renewed and sanctified, the universe will be satisfied that we *ought* to be saved, and will rejoice. Satan will no longer charge the friends of Jesus with insincerity and hypocrisy ; our own minds will be no longer troubled with doubts and fears ; and holy angels will welcome us to their presence. Not a voice will be lifted up in reproach or condemnation, and the Universal Father will stretch out his arms and press to his bosom the returning prodigals. Clothed in the white robes of salvation, we shall be

welcome even in heaven, and the universe will rejoice that we are there.

9. It is a privilege to suffer for the welfare of the church; ver. 24. Paul regarded it as such and *rejoiced* in the trials which came upon him in the cause of religion. The Saviour so regarded it, and shrank not from the great sorrows involved in the work of saving his people. We may suffer much in promoting the same object. We may be exposed to persecution and death. We may be called to part with all we have—to leave country and friends and home, to go and preach the gospel to benighted men. On a foreign shore, far from all that we hold dear on earth, we may lie down and die, and our grave, unmarked by sculptured marble, may be soon forgotten. But to do good; to defend truth; to promote virtue; to save the souls of the perishing, *is worth all which it costs*, and he who accomplishes these things by exchanging for them earthly comforts, and even life, has made a wise exchange. The universe *gains* by it in happiness; and the benevolent heart should rejoice that there *is such a gain*, though attended with our individual and personal suffering.

10. Ministers have a noble office; ver. 24—29. It is their privilege to make known to men the most glorious truths that can come before the human mind; truths which were hid from ages and generations, but which are now revealed by the gospel. These great truths are intrusted to the ministry to explain and defend, and are by them to be carried around the world. The ministers of religion strive not for gold and honour and worldly pleasures; they strive in the noble effort to show to every man that he has a Saviour; that there is a heaven to which he may come; and to present every one perfect before God. With all its sacrifices and self-denials, therefore, it is an inestimable privilege to be a minister of the gospel—for there is no man who diffuses through a community so much solid happiness; there is no one, the result of whose labours reaches so far into future ages. To a

benevolent heart there is no higher privilege than to be permitted to go to *every man*—to the poor, the tempted, the oppressed, the slave, the penitent, and the dying sinner, and to say to him that *he* has a Saviour, that Christ died for *him*, and that, if he will have it so, *he* may have a home in heaven. No matter whom he meets; no matter how debased and degraded he may be to whom he ministers, no matter though it be the poor slave, or the lonely wanderer on pathless sands, or the orphan, or the outcast, the herald of salvation may tell him that there is a heaven for *him*—a Saviour who died for *him*—a God who is ready to pardon and save *his* soul. In such a work it is a privilege to exhaust our strength; in the performance of the duties of such an office, it is an honour to be permitted to wear out life itself. Doing this, a man when he comes to die will feel that he has not lived in vain; and whatever self-denial he may practise in it; however much comfort, or however many friends he may forsake, all these things will give him no pang of regret when from a bed of death he looks out on the eternal world.

CHAPTER II.

ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER.

This entire chapter may be regarded as designed to guard the Colossians against the seductive influence of the false philosophy which tended to draw them away from the gospel. It is evident from the chapter that there were at Colosse, or in the vicinity, professed instructors in religion, who taught an artful and plausible philosophy, adapting themselves to the prejudices of the people, and inculcating opinions that tended to lead them away from the truths which they had embraced. These teachers were probably of Jewish origin, and had adopted many of the arts of a plausible rhetoric, from the prevailing philosophy in that region. See the Intro. § 4. Against the seductive influences of this philosophy, it is the design of this chapter to guard them, and though the apostle does not seem to have intended to pursue an exact logical order; yet the argument in the chapter can

CHAPTER II.

FOR I would that ye knew
what great ¹ conflict I have

1 or, *fear* ; or *care*.

be conveniently regarded as consisting of two parts :—A statement of the reasons why they should be on their guard against the arts of that philosophy ; and a specification of the particular errors to which they were exposed.

1. A statement of the reasons why they should not allow themselves to be drawn away by the influence of the prevalent philosophy ; ver. 1—15. This also consists of two parts.

A. The importance of the subject ; ver. 1—7.

(1.) The apostle felt great solicitude for them, and for all whom he had not seen, that they might hold the truth in reference to the divine existence and perfections ; ver. 1, 2.

(2.) All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were in Christ, and it was, therefore, of the greatest importance to hold to the truth respecting him ; ver. 3.

(3.) They were in danger of being led astray by enticing words ; ver. 4.

(4.) Paul says that he was with them in spirit, and he exhorted them, therefore, to remain rooted and grounded in the doctrines which they had received respecting the Saviour ; ver. 5—7.

B. Reasons why they should be steadfast and not drawn away by the influence of false philosophy ; ver. 8—15.

(1.) The danger of depending on traditions and worldly principles in religion ; of being “spoiled” or robbed by philosophy ; ver. 8.

(2.) All that we need to desire is to be found in Christ ; ver. 9, 10.

(3.) We have received through him the true circumcision—the putting away our sins ; ver. 11.

(4.) We have been buried with him in baptism, and have solemnly devoted ourselves to him, ver. 12.

for you, and for them at Laodicea,
^a and for as many as have not seen
my face in the flesh ;

a Re. 3. 14, &c.

(5.) We have been quickened by him ; our sins have been forgiven ; and everything that hindered our salvation has been taken out of the way by him, and he has triumphed over our foes ; ver. 13—15.

II. Specification of particular errors to which they were exposed, or of particular things to be avoided ; ver. 16—23.

The chapter closes (ver. 20—23) with an earnest exhortation wholly to avoid these things ; not to touch or taste or handle them. However plausible the pretences might be on which they were urged ; whatever appearance of wisdom or humility there might be, the apostle assures them that there was no real honour in them, and that they were wholly to be avoided.

1. *For I would that ye knew.* I wish you knew or fully understood. He supposes that this would deeply affect them if they understood the solicitude which he had had on their account. ¶ *What great conflict.* Marg., *fear, or care.* The Greek word is *agony*—*ἀγῶνα*. It is not, however, the word rendered *agony* in Luke xxii. 44—*ἀγωνία*—though that is derived from this. The word is rendered *conflict* in Phil. i. 30 ; *contention*, 1 Thess. ii. 2 ; *fight*, 1 Tim. vi. 12 ; 2 Tim. iv. 7 ; and *race*, Heb. xii. 1. It properly refers to the combats, contests, struggles, efforts at the public games ; the toil and conflict to obtain a victory. It refers here to the anxious care, the mental conflict, the earnest solicitude which he had in their behalf, in view of the dangers to which they were exposed from Judaizing Christians and Pagan philosophy. This mental struggle resembled that which the combatants had at the public games ; comp. Notes on 1 Cor. ix. 25, 27. *And for them at Laodicea* For Christians there, who were exposed to similar danger. Laodicea

2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in

a chap. 3. 14.

was the capital of Phrygia, in Asia Minor, and a little south of Colosse. See Intro. § 1. 6. Notes on chap. iv. 16. There was a church early planted there—the “lukewarm” church mentioned in Rev. iii. 14. Being in the vicinity of Colosse, the church there would be exposed to the same perils, and the rebuke in Rev. iii. 14, showed that the fears of Paul were well founded, and that the arts of the false teachers were too successful. ¶ *And for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.* That is, evidently in that region. He had, doubtless, a general solicitude for all Christians, but his remark here has reference to those in the neighbourhood of the church at Colosse, or in that church. On the question which has been raised, whether this proves that the apostle Paul had never been at Colosse or Laodicea, see Intro. § 2. 4. This passage does not seem to me to prove that he had not been there. It may mean that he had great solicitude for those Christians there whom he knew, and for all others there, or in the vicinity, even though he was not personally acquainted with them. He may refer (1.) to some churches in the neighbourhood formed since he was there; or (2.) to strangers who had come in there since he was with them; or (3.) to those who had been converted since he was there, and with whom he had no personal acquaintance. For all these he would feel the same solicitude, for they were all exposed to the same danger. To “see one’s face in the flesh,” is a Hebraism, meaning to become personally acquainted with him.

2. *That their hearts might be comforted.* Like all other Christians in the times of the apostles, they were doubtless exposed to trials and persecutions. ¶ *Being knit together in love.* The same word which is here used (*συνεβλήθη*) occurs in Eph. iv. 16, and is rendered *compacted*; see Notes on that place. In Acts ix. 22, it is rendered *proving*; Acts xvi. 10,

love, ^a and unto all riches of the full ^b assurance of understanding,

b Isa. 32. 17; He. 6. 11.

assuredly gathering; 1 Cor. ii. 16, *instruct*; and here, and in ver. 19, *knit together*. It means, properly, *to make to come together*, and hence refers to a *firm union*, as where the heart of Christians are one. Here it means that the way of comforting each other was by solid Christian friendship, and that the means of cementing that was *love*. It was not by a mere outward profession, or by mere speculative faith; it was by a union of affection. ¶ *And unto all riches.* On the meaning of the word *riches*, as used by the apostle Paul, see Notes on Rom. ii. 4. There is a great energy of expression here. The meaning is, that the thing referred to—“the full understanding” of the “mystery” of religion—was an invaluable possession, like abundant wealth. This passage also shows the object for which they should be united. It should be in order that they might obtain this inestimable wealth. If they were divided in affections, and split up into factions, they could not hope to secure it. ¶ *Of the full assurance of understanding.* This word (*πληροφορία*) means *firm persuasion, settled conviction*. It occurs only here and in 1 Thess. i. 5; Heb. vi. 11; x. 22, and is rendered by *assurance*, or *full assurance*, in every instance. See the *verb*, however, in Luke i. 1; Rom. iv. 21; xiv. 5; 2 Tim. iv. 5, 17. It was the desire of the apostle that they might have *entire conviction* of the truth of the Christian doctrines. ¶ *To the acknowledgment.* So as fully and openly to acknowledge or confess this mystery. ¶ *The mystery.* On the meaning of this word, see Notes on Rom. xi. 25; Eph. i. 9. The meaning is, the doctrine respecting God, which had before been concealed or hidden, but which was now revealed in the gospel. It does not mean that there was any thing unintelligible or incomprehensible respecting this doctrine when it was made known. That might be as clear as any other truth.

to the acknowledgment of the mystery ^a of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

3 In ¹ whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

^a 1 John 5.7.

1 or, wherein.

¶ *Of God.* Of God as he *actually* subsists. This does not mean that the mere fact of the *existence* of God was a "mystery," or a truth which had been concealed, for that was not true. But the sense plainly is, that there were truths now made known in the gospel to mankind, about the mode of the divine existence, which had not before been disclosed; and *this* "mystery" he wished them to retain, or fully acknowledge. The "mystery," or the hitherto unrevealed truth, related to the fact that God subsisted in more persons than one, as "Father," and as "Christ." ¶ *And of the Father.* Or, rather, "even of the Father;" for so the word *καὶ* (*and*) is often used. The apostle does not mean that he wished them to acknowledge the hitherto unrevealed truth respecting "God *and* another being called 'the Father;'" but respecting "God" as the "Father," or of God as "Father" and as "Christ." ¶ *And of Christ.* As a person of the God-head. What the apostle wished them to acknowledge was, the full revelation now made known respecting the essential nature of God, as the "Father," and as "Christ." In relation to this, they were in special danger of being corrupted by the prevalent philosophy, as it is in relation to this that error of Christian doctrine usually commences. It should be said, however, that there is great variety of reading in the MSS. on this whole clause, and that many critics (see Rosenmüller) regard it as spurious. I do not see evidence that it is not genuine; and the strain of exhortation of the apostle seems to me to demand it.

3. *In whom.* Marg., *wherein.* The more correct translation is "in whom." The reference is doubtless to Christ, as his name is the immediate antecedent. and as what is affirmed here pro-

4 And this I say lest any man should beguile ^b you with enticing words.

5 For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the Spirit, joying and beholding your

^b Mar. 13.22.

perly appertains to him. ¶ *Are hid.* Like treasures that are concealed or garnered up. It does not mean that none of those "treasures" had been developed; but that, so to speak, Christ, as Mediator, was the great treasure-house where were to be found all the wisdom and knowledge needful for men. ¶ *All the treasures.* It is common to compare any thing valuable with "treasures" of silver or gold. The idea here is, that in reference to the wisdom and knowledge needful for us, Christ is what abundant treasures are in reference to the supply of our wants. ¶ *Wisdom.* The wisdom needful for our salvation. Notes, 1 Cor. i. 24. ¶ *And knowledge.* The knowledge which is requisite to guide us in the way to life. Christ is able to instruct us in all that it is desirable for us to know, so that it is not necessary for us to apply to philosophy, or to the teachings of men.

4. *And this I say.* Respecting the character and sufficiency of the truth revealed in Christ. ¶ *Lest any man should beguile you.* Deceive you, lead you away from the truth. ¶ *With enticing words.* Artful words, smooth and plausible arguments, such as were employed by the Greek sophists and rhetoricians.

5. *For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit.* That is, I seem to see you; I feel as if I were there, and were looking upon you; and I have the same solicitude as if I were there, and saw all the danger which exists that your beautiful order and harmony should be disturbed by the influence of false philosophy; see Notes on 1 Cor. v. 3. The word "spirit," here, does not refer to the Holy Spirit, or to any inspiration by which the apostle was enabled to see them; but it is equivalent to what we mean when we say,

order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ^a ye in him;

^a 1 John 2.6

^b Ep. 3.17.

"My heart is with you." He seemed to be beholding them. ¶ *Joying and beholding your order.* That is, I rejoice as if I saw your order. He had such confidence that everything would be done among them as became Christians, that he could rejoice as if he actually saw it.

6. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord. Have received him by faith as your Saviour, or as you were instructed respecting his rank, character, and work. The object here is to induce them not to swerve from the views which they had of Christ when he was made known to them. They had at first probably received their ideas of the Saviour from the apostle himself (see the Intro.); and, at any rate, the apostle designs to assure them that the views which they had when they "received him," were founded in truth. ¶ *So walk in him.* Continue in those views of Christ; live in the maintenance of them; let them regulate your whole conduct. The word *walk*, in the Scriptures, is used to denote the manner of life; and the sense here is, that they should live and act wholly under the influence of the conceptions which they had of the Saviour when they first embraced him. The particle "*so*" is supplied by our translators, and rather weakens the sense. No stress should be laid on it, as is often done. The meaning is, simply, "Since you have received Christ as your Lord, as he was preached to you, hold fast the doctrine which you have received, and do not permit yourselves to be turned aside by any Jewish teachers, or teachers of philosophy."

7. Rooted—in him. As a tree strikes its roots deep in the earth, so our faith should strike deep into the doctrine respecting the Saviour. See the phrase here used explained in the parallel place in Eph. iii. 17. ¶ *And established in the faith, as ye have been*

7 Rooted ^b and built up in him, ^c and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

8 Beware ^d lest any man spoil ^e John 15.4,5. ^d Ro. 16.17; Ep. 5.6; He. 13.9.

taught. To wit, by the founders of the church, and by those faithful ministers who had succeeded them; Not *s*, chap. i. 7. ¶ *Abounding therein with thanksgiving.* Expressing overflowing thanks to God that you have been made acquainted with truths so precious and glorious. If there is any thing for which we ought to be thankful, it is for the knowledge of the great truths respecting our Lord and Saviour.

8. Beware lest any man spoil you. The word *spoil* now commonly means, to corrupt, to cause to decay and perish, as fruit is spoiled by keeping too long, or paper by wetting, or hay by a long rain, or crops by mildew. But the Greek word here used means to spoil in the sense of *plunder, rob*, as when plunder is taken in war. The meaning is, "Take heed lest any one plunder or rob you of your faith and hope by philosophy." These false teachers would strip them of their faith and hope, as an invading army would rob a country of all that was valuable. ¶ *Through philosophy.* The Greek philosophy prevailed much in the regions around Colosse, and perhaps also the oriental or Gnostic philosophy. See the Intro. They were exposed to the influences of these plausible systems. They consisted much of speculations respecting the nature of the divine existence; and the danger of the Colossians was, that they would rely rather on the deductions of that specious reasoning, than on what they had been taught by their Christian teachers. ¶ *And vain deceit.* Mere fallacy. The idea is, that the doctrines which were advanced in those systems were maintained by plausible, not by solid arguments; by considerations not fitted to lead to the truth, but to lead astray. ¶ *After the tradition of men.* There appear to have been two sources of danger to which the Christians at Colosse were

you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the ¹ rudiments of the world, and not after Christ:

1 or, *elements*. a chap. 1. 19. b He. 5. 9. c 1 Pe. 3. 22.

exposed, and to which the apostle in these cautions alludes, though he is not careful to distinguish them. The one was that arising from the Grecian philosophy; the other, from Jewish opinions. The latter is that to which he refers here. The Jews depended much on tradition (see Notes on Matt. xv. 2); and many of those traditions would have tended much to corrupt the gospel of Christ. ¶ *After the rudiments of the world.* Marg., *elements*. See this explained in the Notes on Gal. iv. 3. ¶ *And not after Christ.* Not such as Christ taught.

9. *For in him dwelleth.* That is, this was the great and central doctrine that was to be maintained about Christ, that all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him. Every system which denied this was a denial of the doctrine which they had been taught; and against every thing that would go to undermine this; they were especially to be on their guard. Almost all heresy has been begun by some form of the denial of the great central truth of the incarnation of the Son of God. ¶ *All the fulness;* Notes, chap. i. 19. ¶ *Of the Godhead.* Of the Divinity, the divine nature—*Θεότης*. The word is one that properly denotes the divine nature and perfections. *Robinson, Lex.* It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. ¶ *Bodily.* *σωματικῶς*. This word also is found nowhere else in the New Testament, though the adjective *bodily*—*σωματικός*—occurs twice; Luke iii. 22, "in a bodily shape;" and 1 Tim. iv. 8, "for bodily exercise profiteth little." The word means, "having a bodily appearance, instead of existing or appearing in a spiritual form;" and the fair sense of the phrase is, that the fulness of the divine nature became incarnate, and was indwelling in the body of the Redeemer. It does not meet the case to say, as Crellius does, that the "whole divine will was in him," for the word *Θεότης*—*godhead*

9 For in him ^a dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

10 And ye are complete ^b in him, which is the head ^c of all principality and power;

—does not mean the *will* of God; and it is as certainly true that the inspired prophets were under the control of the divine will, as that the Saviour was. Nor can it mean, as Socinus supposes, that the fulness of divine knowledge dwelt in him, for this is not the proper meaning of the word (*Θεότης*) *godhead*; nor can it mean, for the same reason, that a fulness of *divine gifts* was intrusted to him. The language is such as would be obviously employed on the supposition that God became incarnate, and appeared in human form; and there is no other idea which it so naturally expresses, nor is there any other which it can be *made* to express without a forced construction. The meaning is, that it was not any *one* attribute of the Deity that became incarnate in the Saviour; that he was not merely endowed with the knowledge, or the power, or the wisdom of God; but that the whole Deity thus became incarnate, and appeared in human form; comp. John xiv. 9; i. 18. No language could, therefore, more clearly demonstrate the divinity of Christ. Of what mere man—of what angel, could it be used?

10. *And ye are complete in him.* Having no need, for the purposes of salvation, of any aid to be derived from the philosophy of the Greeks, or the traditions of the Jews. All that is necessary to secure your salvation is to be found in the Lord Jesus. There is a *completion*, or a *filling up*, in him, so as to leave nothing wanting. This is true in respect (1.) to the *wisdom* which is needful to guide us; (2.) the *atonement* to be made for sin; (3.) the *merit* by which a sinner can be justified; and (4.) the *grace* which is needful to sustain us in the trials, and to aid us in the duties, of life; comp. Notes on 1 Cor. i. 30. There is no necessity, therefore, that we should look to the aid of philosophy, as if there was a defect in the teachings of the Saviour; or to human

11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision ^a made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

12 Buried ^b with him in bap-

^a Je. 4. 4; Phil. 3. 3.

strength, as if he were unable to save us; or to the merits of the saints, as if those of the Redeemer were not sufficient to meet all our wants. The sentiment advanced in this verse would overthrow the whole papal doctrine of the merits of the saints, and, of course, the whole doctrine of papal "indulgences." ¶ *Which is the head;* see Notes on Eph. i. 21, 22.

11. *In whom.* In connection with whom, or in virtue of whose religion. ¶ *Ye are circumcised.* You have received that which was designed to be represented by circumcision—the putting away of sin; Notes, Phil. iii. 3. ¶ *With the circumcision made without hands.* That made in the heart by the renunciation of all sin. The Jewish teachers insisted on the necessity of the literal circumcision in order to salvation (comp. Eph. ii. 11); and hence this subject is so often introduced into the writings of Paul, and he is at so much pains to show that, by believing in Christ, all was obtained which was required in order to salvation. Circumcision was an ordinance by which it was denoted that all sin was to be cut off or renounced, and that he who was circumcised was to be devoted to God and to a holy life. All this, the apostle says, was obtained by the gospel; and, consequently they had all that was denoted by the ancient rite of circumcision. What Christians had obtained, moreover, related to the heart; it was not a mere ordinance pertaining to the flesh. ¶ *In putting off the body of the sins of the flesh.* That is, in renouncing the deeds of the flesh, or becoming holy. The word "body," here, seems to be used with reference to circumcision. In that ordinance, the body of the flesh was subjected to the rite; with Christians, it is the body of sin that is cut off. ¶ *By the*

tism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation ^c of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

13 And ^d you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision

^b Ro. 6. 4, 5. ^c Ep. 1. 19. ^d Eph. 2. 1, 5, 11.

circumcision of Christ. Not by the fact that Christ was circumcised, but that we have that kind of circumcision which Christ established, to wit, the *renouncing of sin.* The idea of the apostle here seems to be, that since we have thus been enabled by Christ to renounce sin, and to devote ourselves to God, we should not be induced by any plausible arguments to return to an ordinance pertaining to the flesh, as if that were needful for salvation.

12. *Buried with him in baptism;* see Notes on Rom. vi. 4. ¶ *Wherein also.* In which ordinance, or by virtue of that which is signified by the ordinance. *Ye are risen with him.* From the death of sin to the life of religion; Notes Rom. vi. 4, 5; comp. Notes Eph. ii. 5, 6. ¶ *Through the faith of the operation of God.* By a firm belief on the agency of God in raising him up; that is, a belief of the fact that God has raised him from the dead. The resurrection of Christ is often represented as the foundation of all our hopes; and, as he was raised from the grave to die no more, so, in virtue of that we are raised from the death of sin to eternal spiritual life. The belief of this is shown by our baptism, whatever be the mode in which that ordinance is performed, and as well shown in one mode as another.

13. *And you, being dead in your sins;* Notes, Eph. ii. 1. ¶ *And the uncircumcision of your flesh.* That is, Gentiles, and giving unrestrained indulgence to the desires of the flesh. They lived as those who had not by any religious rite or covenant brought themselves under obligations to lead holy lives. ¶ *Hath he quickened;* Notes, Eph. ii. 1. ¶ *Together with him.* In virtue of his being restored to life. That is, the resurrection of

of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

14 Blotting ^a out the hand-
a Ep. 2.15, 16.

the Lord Jesus was the means of imparting to us spiritual life.

14. *Blotting out the handwriting.* The word rendered *handwriting* means something written by the hand, a manuscript; and here, probably, the *writings* of the Mosaic law, or the law appointing many ordinances or observances in religion. The allusion is probably to a written contract, in which we bind ourselves to do any work, or to make a payment, and which remains in force against us until the bond is cancelled. That might be done, either by blotting out the names, or by drawing lines through it, or, as appears to have been practised in the East, by driving a nail through it. The Jewish ceremonial law is here represented as such a contract, binding those under it to its observance, until it was nailed to the cross. The meaning here is, that the burdensome requirements of the Mosaic law are abolished, and that its necessity is superseded by the death of Christ. His death had the same effect, in reference to those ordinances, as if they had been blotted from the statute-book. This it did by fulfilling them, by introducing a more perfect system, and by rendering their observance no longer necessary, since all that they were designed to typify had been now accomplished in a better way; comp. Notes, Eph. ii. 15. ¶ *Of ordinances.* Prescribing the numerous rites and ceremonies of the Jewish religion. ¶ *That was against us.* That is, against our peace, happiness, comfort; or in other words, which was oppressive and burdensome; comp. Notes, Acts xv. 10. Those ordinances bound and fettered the soul, restrained the expansive spirit of true piety which seeks the salvation of all alike, and thus operated as a *hindrance* to the enlarged spirit of true religion. Thus they really operated *against* the truly pious Jew, whose religion would lead him to seek the

writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross

salvation of the world; and to the *Gentile*, since he was not in a situation to avail himself of them, and since they would be burdensome if he could. It is in this sense, probably, that the apostle uses the word "*us*," as referring to all, and as cramping and restraining the true nature of religion. ¶ *Which was contrary to us.* Operated as a hindrance, or obstruction, in the matter of religion. The ordinances of the Mosaic law were *necessary*, in order to introduce the gospel; but they were always burdensome. They were to be confined to one people; and, if they were continued, they would operate to prevent the spread of the true religion around the world; comp. Notes on 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9. Hence the exulting language of the apostle in view of the fact that they were now taken away, and that the benefits of religion might be diffused all over the world. The gospel contains nothing which is "*against*," or "*contrary to*," the true interest and happiness of any nation or any class of men. ¶ *And took it out of the way.* Gr., "Out of the midst;" that is, he wholly removed it. He has removed the obstruction, so that it no longer prevents union and harmony between the Jews and the Gentiles. ¶ *Nailing it to his cross.* As if he had nailed it to his cross, so that it would be entirely removed out of our way. The death of Jesus had the same effect, in regard to the rites and institutions of the Mosaic religion, as if they had been affixed to his cross. It is said that there is an allusion here to the ancient method by which a bond or obligation was cancelled, by driving a nail through it, and affixing it to a post. This was practised, says Grotius, in Asia. In a somewhat similar manner, in our banks now, a sharp instrument like the blade of a knife is driven through a check, making a hole through it, and furnishing to the teller of the bank a sign or evidence that it has

15 *And having a spoiled principalities and powers, he made a*

shew of them openly, triumphing over them in¹ it.

α Ps. 68. 18; Is. 53. 12; Lu. 10. 18; 11. 22; John 12. 31; He. 2. 14.

1 or, *himself*.

been paid. If this be the meaning, then the expression here denotes that the obligation of the Jewish institutions ceased on the death of Jesus, *as if* he had taken them and nailed them to his own cross, in the manner in which a bond was cancelled.

15. *And having spoiled.* Plundered as a victorious army does a conquered country. Notes on ver. 8. The terms used in this verse are all military, and the idea is, that Christ has completely subdued our enemies by his death. A complete victory was achieved by his death, so that every thing is now in subjection to him, and we have nothing to fear. ¶ *Principalities and powers*; Notes, Eph. i. 21; vi. 12. The "principalities and powers" here referred to, are the formidable enemies that had held man in subjection, and prevented his serving God. There can be no doubt, I think, that the apostle refers to the ranks of fallen, evil spirits which had usurped a dominion over the world; Notes, John xii 31; Eph. ii. 2. The Saviour, by his death, wrested the dominion from them, and seized upon what they had captured as a conqueror seizes upon his prey. Satan and his legions had invaded the earth and drawn its inhabitants into captivity, and subjected them to their evil reign. Christ, by his death, subdues the invaders and recaptures those whom they had subdued. ¶ *He made a show of them openly.* As a conqueror, returning from a victory, displays in a triumphal procession the kings and princes whom he has taken, and the spoils of victory. This was commonly done when a "triumph" was decreed for a conqueror. On such occasions it sometimes happened that a considerable number of prisoners were led along amidst the scenes of triumph; see Notes on 2 Cor. ii. 14. Paul says that this was now done "*openly*"—that is, it was in the face of the whole universe—a grand victory; a glorious

triumph over all the powers of hell. It does not refer to any public procession or display on the earth; but to the grand victory as achieved in view of the universe, by which Christ, as a conqueror, dragged Satan and his legions at his triumphal car; comp. Rom. xvi. 20. ¶ *Triumphing over them in it.* Marg., "or, *himself*." Either "by the cross," or by "*himself*." Or, it may mean, as Rosenmüller suggests, that "God (ver. 12) triumphed over these foes in *him*; i. e., in *Christ*." The sense is substantially the same, that this triumph was effected by the atonement made for sin by the Redeemer. See the word *triumph* explained in the Notes on 2 Cor. ii. 14. The meaning of all this is, that since Christ has achieved for us such a victory, and has subdued all the foes of man, we should not be led captive, but should regard ourselves as freemen. We should not be made again the slaves of custom, or habit, or ritual observances, or superstitious rites, or anything whatever that has its origin in the kingdom of darkness. We are bound to assert and to use our freedom, and should not allow any hostile power in the form of philosophy or false teaching of any kind, to *plunder* or "*spoil*" us; ver. 8. The Christian is a freeman. His great Captain has subdued all his enemies, and we should not allow them again to set up their dark empire over our souls. The *argument* of the apostle in these verses (13—15) is derived from what Christ has done for us. He mentions *four* things. (1.) He has given us spiritual life; (2.) he has forgiven all our trespasses; (3.) he has blotted out or abolished the "ordinances" that were against us; and (4.) he has triumphed over all our foes. From all this he infers (ver. 16, seq.) that we should not be made captive or subdued by any of the rites of superstition, or any of the influences of the kingdom of darkness.

16 Let no man therefore judge ^a you in ¹ meat, or in drink, or in ² respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days ;

16. *Let no man, therefore, judge you;* comp. Notes on Rom. xiv. 10, 13. The word *judge* here is used in the sense of pronouncing a sentence. The meaning is, "since you have thus been delivered by Christ from the evils which surrounded you ; since you have been freed from the observances of the law, let no one sit in judgment on you, or claim the right to decide for you in those matters. You are not responsible to man for your conduct, but to Christ ; and no man has a right to impose that on you as a burden from which he has made you free." ¶ *In meat.* Marg., *or eating and drinking.* The meaning is, "in respect to the various articles of food and drink." There is reference here, undoubtedly, to the distinctions which the Jews made on this subject, implying that an effort had been made by Jewish teachers to show them that the Mosaic laws were binding on all. ¶ *Or in respect of a holy day.* Marg., *part.* The meaning is, "in the part, or the particular of a holy day ; that is, in respect to it." The word rendered "holy-day"—*ἡμέρα*—means properly a feast or festival ; and the allusion here is to the festivals of the Jews. The sense is, that no one had a right to impose their observance on Christians, or to condemn them if they did not keep them. They had been delivered from that obligation by the death of Christ ; ver. 14. ¶ *Or of the new moon.* On the appearance of the new moon, among the Hebrews, in addition to the daily sacrifices, two bullocks, a ram, and seven sheep, with a meat offering, were required to be presented to God ; Num. x. 10 ; xxviii. 11—14. The new moon in the beginning of the month Tisri (October) was the beginning of their civil year, and was commanded to be observed as a festival ; Lev. xxiii. 24, 25. ¶ *Or of the Sabbath days.* Gr., "of the Sabbaths." The word *Sabbath* in the Old Testament is applied not

17 Which are a shadow ^b of things to come ; but the body *is* of Christ

^a Ro.14.10,13. 1 or. for eating and drinking,
² or. part. ^b He.8.5.

only to the seventh day, but to all the days of holy rest that were observed by the Hebrews, and particularly to the beginning and close of their great festivals. There is, doubtless, reference to those days in this place, as the word is used in the plural number, and the apostle does not refer particularly to the Sabbath properly so called. There is no evidence from this passage that he would teach that there was no obligation to observe any holy time, for there is not the slightest reason to believe that he meant to teach that one of the ten commandments had ceased to be binding on mankind. If he had used the word in the singular number—"the Sabbath," it would then, of course, have been clear that he meant to teach that that commandment had ceased to be binding, and that a Sabbath was no longer to be observed. But the use of the term in the plural number, and the connection, show that he had his eye on the great number of days which were observed by the Hebrews as festivals, as a part of their ceremonial and typical law, and not to the moral law, or the ten commandments. No part of the moral law—no one of the ten commandments could be spoken of as "a shadow of good things to come." These commandments are, from the nature of moral law, of perpetual and universal obligation.

17. *Which are a shadow of things to come ;* see Notes on Heb. viii. 5 ; x. 1. They were only a dim outline of future things, not the reality. ¶ *But the body is of Christ.* The reality, the substance. All that they signified is *of* or *in* Christ. Between those things themselves which are in Christ, and those which only represented or prefigured them, there is as much difference as there is between a body and a shadow ; a solid substance and a mere outline. *Ἰλα-*

18 Let ^a no man ¹ beguile you of your reward, ² in a voluntary

^a Re.3.11. ¹ or, judge against you.

² being a voluntary in humility.

ing now, therefore, the *thing itself* the shadow can be to us of no value; and that having come which was prefigured, that which was designed merely to represent it, is no longer binding.

18. *Let no man beguile you of your reward.* Marg., *judge against you.* The word here used—καταβρ-βύω—occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It is a word which was employed with reference to the distribution of prizes at the Grecian games, and means, *to give the prize against any one, to deprive of the palm.* Hence it means *to deprive of a due reward*; and the sense here is, that they were to be on their guard lest the “reward”—the crown of victory to which they looked forward—should be wrested from them by the arts of others. That would be done if they should be persuaded to turn back, or to falter in the race. The only way to secure the prize was to hold on in the race which they then were running; but if they yielded to the philosophy of the Greeks, and the teachings of the Jews, they would be defrauded of this reward as certainly as a racer at the games would if the crown of victory should be unjustly awarded to another. In this case, too, as real injustice would be done, though the apostle does not say it would be in the same manner. Here it would be by art; in the case of the racer it would be by a wrong decision—but in either case the crown was lost. This exhortation has the more force from this consideration. Against an unjust judge we could have no power; but we may take care that the reward be not wrested from us by fraud. ¶ *In a voluntary humility.* Marg., “*being a voluntary in humility.*” Tindal renders this, “Let no man make you shoot at a wrong mark, which, after his own imagination, walketh in the humbleness of angels.” The word used here (ταπει-

humility and worshipping of angels, intruding ^b into those things

^b De.29.29; Job 38.2.

ταπεινότης) means *lowliness of mind, modesty, humbleness of deportment*; and the apostle refers, doubtless, to the spirit assumed by those against whom he would guard the Colossians—the spirit of modesty or of humble inquirers. The meaning is, that they would not announce their opinions with dogmatic certainty, but they would put on the appearance of great modesty. In this way, they would become really more dangerous—for no false teachers are so dangerous as those who assume the aspect of great humility, and who manifest great reverence for divine things. The word rendered “voluntary” here—Σίλων—does not, properly, belong to the word rendered “humility.” It rather appertains to the subsequent part of the sentence, and means that the persons referred to were *willing*, or had pleasure in attempting, to search into the hidden and abstruse things of religion. They were desirous of appearing to do this with an humble spirit—even with the modesty of an angel—but still they had pleasure in that profound and dangerous kind of inquiry. ¶ *And worshipping of angels.*—Θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων. This does not mean, as it seems to me, that they would *themselves worship angels*, or that they would teach others to do it—for there is no reason to believe this. Certainly the Jewish teachers, whom the apostle seems to have had particularly in his eye, would not do it; nor is there any evidence that *any* class of false teachers would deliberately teach that *angels* were to be worshipped. The reference is rather to the profound reverence; the spirit of lowly piety which the angels evinced, and to the fact that the teachers referred to would assume the same spirit, and were, therefore, the more dangerous. They would come professing profound regard for the great mysteries of religion, and for the incomprehensible

which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind ;

19 And not holding the Head, ^a from which all the body by joints

^a Ep. 4. 15, 16.

perfections of the divinity, and would approach the subject professedly with the awful veneration which the angels have when they "look into these things;" 1 Pet. i. 12. There was no bold, irreverent, or confident declamation, but the danger in the case arose from the fact that they *assumed* so much the aspect of modest piety; so much the appearance of the lowly devotion of angelic beings. The word here rendered *worship*—*σπν-εσις*—occurs in the New Testament only here, in Acts xxvi. 5; and James i. 26, 27, in each of which places it is rendered *religion*. It means here the religion, or the spirit of humble reverence and devotion which is evinced by the angels; and this accords well with the meaning in James i. 26, 27. ¶ *Intruding into those things which he hath not seen.* Or *inquiring* into them. The word used here (*ὑπερβαίνω*) means to go in, or enter; then to investigate, to inquire. It has not, properly, the meaning of *intruding*, or of impertinent inquiry (see Passow), and I do not see that the apostle meant to characterize the inquiry here as such. He says that it was the object of their investigations to look, with great professed modesty and reverence, into those things which are not visible to the eye of mortals. The "things" which seem here to be particularly referred to, are the abstruse questions respecting the mode of the divine subsistence; the ranks, orders, and employments of angelic beings; and the obscure doctrines relating to the divine government and plans. These questions comprised most of the subjects of inquiry in the Oriental and Grecian philosophy, and inquiries on these the apostle apprehended would tend to draw away the mind from the "simplicity that is in Christ." Of these subjects what *can* be known more than is revealed? ¶ *Vainly puffed up by his fleshly*

and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

20 Wherefore, if ye be dead

mind. Notwithstanding the avowed "humility," the modesty, the *angelic reverence*, yet the mind was full of vain conceit, and self-confident, carnal wisdom. The two things are by no means incompatible—the men apparently most meek and modest being sometimes the most bold in their speculations, and the most reckless in regard to the great landmarks of truth. It is not so with *true* modesty, and *real* "angelic veneration," but all this is sometimes assumed for the purpose of deceiving; and sometimes there is a native appearance of modesty which is by no means an index of the true feelings of the soul. The most meek and modest men in appearance are sometimes the most proud and reckless in their investigations of the doctrines of religion.

19. *And not holding the Head.* Not holding the true doctrine respecting the Great Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ; Notes, Eph. i. 22. This is regarded here as essential to the maintenance of all the other doctrines of religion. He who has just views of the Redeemer will not be in much danger of erring respecting the other points of religious belief. ¶ *From which all the body, &c.* This passage is almost word for word the same as in Eph. iv. 15, 16. See it explained in the Notes there.

20. *Wherefore.* In view of all that has been said. If it be true that you are really dead to the world, why do you act *as if* you still lived under the principles of the world? ¶ *If ye be dead with Christ.* If you are dead to the world in virtue of his death. The apostle here, as elsewhere, speaks of a very close union with Christ. We died with him; that is, such was the efficacy of his death, and such is our union with him, that *we* became dead also to the world; Notes, Rom. vi. 2, 4, 8, 11. ¶ *From the rudiments*

with Christ from the ¹ rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

1 or, elements.

of the world. Marg., *elements*. The elements or principles which are of a worldly nature, and which reign among worldly men; see Notes on Gal. iv. 3. ¶ *Why, as though living in the world.* Why do you allow them to influence you, as though you were living and acting under those worldly principles? They ought no more to do it, than the things of this world influence those who are in their graves. ¶ *Are ye subject to ordinances.* The rites and ceremonies of the Jewish religion; see Notes, Gal. v. 1—4.

21. *Touch not; taste not; handle not.* These words seem intended as a *specimen* of the kind of ordinances which the apostle refers to, or an *imitation* of the language of the Jewish teachers in regard to various kinds of food and drink. "Why are ye subject to ordinances of various kinds, *such as this*—Touch not, taste not, handle not?" That is, such as prohibit you from even touching certain kinds of food, or tasting certain kinds of drink, or handling certain prohibited things. The rapid succession of the words here, without any connecting particle, is supposed to denote the *eagerness* of the persons who imposed this injunction, and their *earnestness* in warning others from contaminating themselves with the prohibited things. Many injunctions of this kind are found in the writings of the Jewish Rabbins; and the ancient Jewish sect of the Essenes (Notes, Matt. iii. 7) abounded in precepts of this kind. See *Schoetgen*, and *Pict. Bib.* in *loc.* "They allowed themselves no food that was pleasant to the taste, but ate dry, coarse bread, and drank only water. Many of them ate nothing until sunset, and, if any one touched them who did not belong to their sect, they washed themselves as if they had been most deeply defiled. Perhaps

21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not;

22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

there was at Colosse a society of this kind, as there were in many other places out of Judea; and, if there was, it is not improbable that many Christians imitated them in the peculiarity of their rules and observances;" comp. Jennings's Jew. Ant. i. 471, and Ros. Alt. u. neu. Morgenland, in *loc.* If this be the correct interpretation, then these are not the words of the apostle, forbidding Christians to have anything to do with these ordinances, but are introduced as a *specimen* of the manner in which they who enjoined the observance of those ordinances pressed the subject on others. There were certain things which they prohibited, in conformity with what they understood to be the law of Moses; and they were constantly saying, in regard to them, "do not touch them, taste them, handle them." These words are often used as a kind of motto in reference to the use of intoxicating drinks. They express very well what is held by the friends of total abstinence; but it is obvious that they had no such reference as used by the apostle, nor should they be alleged as an *authority*, or as an *argument*, in the question about the propriety or impropriety of the use of spirituous liquors. They may as well be employed in reference to anything else as that, and would have no *authority* in either case. Intoxicating drinks should be abstained from; but the obligation to do it should be made to rest on solid arguments, and not on passages of Scripture like this. This passage could with more plausibility be pressed into the service of the enemies of the total abstinence societies, than into their support; but it really has nothing to do with the subject, one way or the other.

22. *Which all are to perish with the using.* This is commonly marked as a part of the parenthesis, or the

23 Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will-worship,

quotation; and there is considerable difficulty in ascertaining its true meaning. It seems most probable that these are the words of the apostle himself, thrown in in the rapidity of composition, and that they are not to be connected with the phrase "touch not," &c. If so, the idea is, that it cannot be of so much consequence as the Jewish teachers supposed, to mark distinctly the difference between meats and drinks. They were all to perish with the use of them. Nothing was permanent about them. It could really then be of no great importance what was eaten, or what was drunk, provided it was not in itself injurious. These ordinances had a value among the Hebrews when it was designed to keep them as a distinct people; but they had no value in themselves, so as to make them binding on all mankind. To suppose this, was the common error of the Jews; and hence the apostle so frequently laboured to show that the Jewish rites had no permanent value; see Notes on Rom. xiv. 1—6; 1 Cor. viii; comp. Notes on Matt. xv. 17, 18. According to this interpretation, the 21st verse should be regarded as expressing the common maxim of the Jewish teachers, and the clause before us as the words of the apostle, and should be marked as a parenthesis. So it is marked in Hahn's Ed. of the New Testament. ¶ *After the commandments and doctrines of men.* Many of the ordinances on which the Jews insisted were those which were handed down by tradition. They depended on human authority only, and of course, should not bind the conscience. Others take the words here to mean, "All which things tend to the corruption of religion (*Doddridge*), or are cause of destruction or condemnation (*Rob. Lex.*), by the use of these things, according to the commandments and doctrines of these men."

23. *Which things.* Which scrupulous observance of the numerous precepts enjoining rites and ceremonies, the observance of days, and the dis-

tinctions between meats and drinks ¶ *Have indeed a show of wisdom* Have a great appearance of piety and of regard for the will of God They have a show of "wisdom," too, or of a deep acquaintance with divine things. They who insist on them *appear* to be learned in what constitutes religion, and to have a deep insight into its mysteries. Doubtless they who urged the obligation of these things laid claim to uncommon acquaintance with the nature of religion, and urged the observance of these things on the ground of their tendency to promote piety, just as they always do who insist much on the observance of religious rites and ceremonies. ¶ *In will-worship.* Voluntary worship; i. e., worship beyond what God strictly requires—supererogatory service. Probably many of these things they did not urge as being strictly *required*, but as conducting greatly to piety. The plea doubtless was, that piety might be promoted by service rendered *beyond* what was absolutely enjoined, and that thus there would be evinced a spirit of uncommon piety—a readiness not only to obey *all* that God required, but even to go *beyond* this, and to render him *voluntary* service. There is much plausibility in this; and this has been the foundation of the appointment of the fasts and festivals of the church; of penances and self-inflicted tortures; of painful vigils and pilgrimages; of works of supererogation, and of the merits of the "saints." A large part of the corruptions of religion have arisen from this plausible but deceitful argument. God knew best what things it was most conducive to piety for his people to observe; and we are most safe when we adhere most closely to what he has appointed, and observe no more days and ordinances than he has directed. There is much apparent piety about these things; but there is much wickedness of heart at the bottom, and there is nothing that more tends to corrupt pure religion. ¶ *And humility*; Notes on ver. 18. There is a

and humility, and ¹ neglecting of the body ; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

1, or, *punishing* ; or, *not sparing*.

great show of reverence for divine things in the manner in which they pursue their investigations, and in their humble and meek compliance with painful rites and ceremonies ; in fastings, abstinence, and penances. Under all this there lurks often the worst kind of pride ; for

"Pride may be pampered while the flesh grows lean."

¶ *And neglecting the body.* Putting on sackcloth and ashes ; subjecting it to painful fastings and penances ; appearing in a form of squalid poverty, *as if* the body were not worth regarding, and *as if* the attention were so much engrossed by the nobler care of the soul, as to be entirely regardless of the body. Yet, we may observe, (1.) God made the body as well as the soul, and has shown *his* care of it by its "being fearfully and wonderfully made," and by all the provision which he has made for all its wants. (2.) Religion pertains to the body as well as the soul, and should teach a man properly to regard it. Man is bound so to take care of the body, as to have the most health and the longest life possible in the service of his Creator, and so as to be able to employ it in the best manner. There is no religion in ragged or squalid clothing, in a dirty face, in offensive personal habits, in filth and defilement, and in setting at defiance the decencies of life. (3.) Much affected sanctity may exist where there is a most proud and corrupt heart. A long face, a demure countenance, a studied disregard of the decencies of dress and the courtesies of life, *as if* they were unworthy of notice, may be the *exponent* of the most hateful pride, and of the basest purposes of the soul. A man should be on his guard always against one who, under pretence of extraordinary sanctity, professes to despise the ordinary dress and usages of society. ¶ *Not in any honour.* That is, there is no real honour in these things ; there is nothing to ennoble and elevate the soul ; nothing that is

to be commended. ¶ *To the satisfying of the flesh.* The only effect is, to satisfy or please the flesh ; that is, the carnal and corrupt nature, for so the word *flesh* is often used in the Scriptures. The effect of these observances, on which so much stress is laid as if they would promote piety, is merely to gratify pride, self-righteousness, the love of distinction, and the other carnal propensities of our nature. There *seems* to be a great deal of humility and piety in them ; there is really little else than pride, selfishness, and ambition.

REMARKS.

1. We should feel a deep interest for the welfare of other Christians, even those whom we have never seen ; ver. 1, 2. All belong to the same family, have the same enemies to contend with, are engaged in the same warfare, are travelling to the same heaven. By our prayers and sympathy, we may often do much good to those whom we shall never see till we meet them in heaven.

2. We should be on our guard against the seductive arts of false teachers. They are often plausible ; they can urge arguments which we may not be able to answer ; they may have much more learning than we have ; and they may put on the appearance of great humility and of real piety ; ver. 3, 4,

3. It is, in general, a safe rule for a Christian to abide by the views which he had on the great subjects of religion when he became converted ; ver. 6. Then the heart was tender and soft—like wax—and received the impression which the Spirit made on it. There are some things in which the *heart* judges better than the *head* ; and in which we are quite as likely to go right if we follow the former as we are the latter. In relation to the performance of many of the duties of life—the duties of kindness and charity—the heart is often a more safe guide than the head ; and so in many

things pertaining more immediately to religion, a man is more likely to judge right if he follows the promptings of his feelings in the happiest moments of piety, than he is to wait for the more cool and cautious course of argument. The same thing may be true even of many of the *doctrines* of religion. When a poor sinner trembles on the verge of hell, he feels that none but an *Almighty* Saviour can deliver him, and he goes and commits himself to Jesus *as God*—and he is not in much danger of erring in that. He will be more likely to be drawn aside from the truth by the artful reasonings of the advocates of error, than he will by his *feelings* at that moment.

4. Our views of the “mystery of God”—of the divine nature, and especially of the rank and character of Christ, will determine *all* our views of theology; ver. 2. This *has* been so in all ages; and however it may be accounted for, the fact is undoubted, that if at any time we can ascertain what are the prevalent views of Christ we can easily see what is the prevailing character of the theology of that age. The influence of this will be felt on the views which are held of the native character of man: of regeneration, the divine purposes, the nature of holiness, and the retributions beyond the grave. Hence, the reason why the apostle Paul insisted so much on this, and urged so earnestly the importance of adhering to just views of the Saviour.

5. Christ has laid us under the highest obligations to love and serve him; ver. 11—15. He has enabled us to put off our sins; he has raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life; he has removed the old ordinances that were against us, and has made religion easy and pleasant; he has subdued our enemies, and triumphed over them. He achieved a glorious victory over “principalities and powers,” and has led our great enemy captive. He met the enemy of man when on earth, and overcame his power of temptation; expelled him from the bodies of men; laid the foundation for a permanent victory

over him on the cross, and triumphed over him when he rose and ascended to heaven. Satan is now an humbled foe. His power is broken and limited, and the Lord Jesus will yet completely triumph over him. He will return from heaven; raise *all* the dead; and reascend, in the face of the universe, to his native skies, with all his ransomed hosts—the “spoils” of victory. We should not then fear what Satan can do to us; nor should we fear that the great enemy of the church will ever be triumphant.

Stand up, my soul, shake off thy fears,
And gird the gospel armour on;
March to the gates of endless joy,
Where thy great Captain Saviour's gone.

Hell and thy sins resist thy course,
But hell and sin are vanquish'd foes;
Thy Jesus nail'd them to the cross,
And sung the triumph when he rose.

Then let my soul march boldly on,
Press forward to the heavenly gate;
There peace and joy eternal reign,
And glittering robes for conquerors wait.

Then shall I wear a starry crown,
And triumph in Almighty grace;
While all the armies of the skies
Join in my glorious Leader's praise.

6. No individual has a right to appoint ceremonies and ordinances in the church to be binding on the consciences of others; nor is this authority intrusted to any body of men; ver. 16. What *God* has enjoined is to be obeyed. What *man* enjoins beyond that, is of no binding force on the conscience: and it is the solemn and sacred duty of all Christians to resist all such attempts to make ceremonial observances binding on the conscience. Christ has appointed a *few* ordinances of religion—and they are enough. They are simple, easily observed, and all adapted to promote piety. He appointed baptism and the Lord's supper; but he appointed no stated festivals or fasts; no days in commemoration of the saints, or of his own birth or death; he enjoined no rites of religion but those which are most simple and which are easily observed. He well knew how those observances would be abused to the purposes of superstition, and *obscure the great doc-*

CHAPTER III.

IF ye then be risen ^a with Christ, seek those things which are

trine of justification by faith. He knew how ready men would be to rely on them rather than on the merits of the great Sacrifice, and hence he appointed no ordinance where that danger could exist.

7. Pride is often united with apparent humility; ver. 18. It is easy to *assume* the appearance of humility in the outer deportment, but no such assumed appearance reaches the heart. That remains the same, whatever external appearance is assumed, until it is renewed by the grace of God.

8. A meek, modest, and candid demeanour is consistent with great boldness and daring in speculation; ver. 18. The most daring speculators in religion; they who make the most reckless attacks on the truth, are often, to appearance, eminently candid, and even put on the aspect of angelic devotion. Yet they are bold "where angels fear to tread;" and they declaim with confidence on subjects which must be for ever beyond the grasp of the human mind.

9. We should not infer, because a man is modest and humble, and because he appears to be endued with uncommon meekness and piety, that, *therefore*, he is a good man or a safe guide; ver. 18. The teachers in Colosse, against whom Paul warned the Christians there, appear to have been men just of this stamp; and this is commonly *assumed* by those who would lead their fellow-men into error. "Satan is often transformed into an angel of light."

10. We should not attempt to penetrate into those things which lie beyond the grasp of the human mind; ver. 18. We should not "intrude into those things which are unseen." There is an outer limit to our investigations on all subjects, and we soon reach it. In life we are to act chiefly on *facts*; not on the *reason* why those facts exist. When we have ascertained or established a *fact*, our feet stand on a solid rock; and there we shall stand securely. We act safely and wisely if

above, where Christ ^b sitteth on the right hand of God.

^a chap. 2. 12.

^b Ro. 8. 34.

we act in view of *that fact*; we do *not* act safely or wisely if we disregard that, and act on theory or imagination.

11. Many real Christians are in danger of being "beguiled of the reward" which they might obtain; ver.

18. They are allured by the world; they are drawn into error by the arts of philosophy; they obscure the lustre of their piety by conformity to the world, and thus they lose the high recompense which they might have obtained in heaven. For the rewards of heaven will be strictly in proportion to the measure of our religion here—the zeal, and faith, and love which we evince in the cause of our Master.

12. Many persons are in danger of losing the "reward" altogether—for the "reward" of a life of piety is set before all; ver. 18. Heaven is offered freely to all, and there is no one who might not obtain it. But, alas! how many there are who are drawn aside by the allurements of error and of sin; who are led to defer to a future time the great subject of preparation for death; who spend their lives in disregard of the commands of God and the invitations of mercy, until it is too late to seek salvation, and they sink down to final ruin. Every impenitent sinner is in imminent danger of losing his soul. The great deceiver is endeavouring to blind him and decoy him down to death, and a thousand snares on every side are spread for his feet, into which he is in constant danger of falling. In a world of allurements, where the work of death from the beginning has been carried on chiefly by deception, with what solicitude should man guard himself lest he be "beguiled of heaven" and sink to a world where heaven will be offered no more!

CHAPTER III.

ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER.

In the previous chapter, the apostle had showed what a true Christian ought *not* to follow after. He had warned the Colossians against the dangers of false philosophy, and the

2 Set your ¹ affection on things above, not ^a on things on the earth.

1 or, *mind*.

a 1 John 2.15.

doctrines of erroneous teachers. In this chapter, he teaches them what they *ought* to pursue and to seek. He therefore enjoins various duties in the different relations of life, which they ought to perform in such a way as to show that true religion had a controlling influence over their hearts. He specifies the following: (1.) The duty of setting the affections on things above; ver. 1—4. They were risen with Christ (chap. ii. 12), they were dead to sin (ver. 3); they were soon to be like Christ (ver. 4), and they should, therefore, fix their affections on heavenly things. (2.) The duty of mortifying their corrupt passions and carnal propensities; ver. 5—8. (3.) The duty of speaking the truth, since they had put off the old man with his deeds; ver. 9—11. (4.) The duty of kindness, gentleness, charity, and the spirit of peace; ver. 12—15. (5.) The duty of edifying one another by psalms and songs of praise; ver. 16, 17. (6.) The duty of wives, ver. 18; (7.) of husbands, ver. 19; (8.) of children, ver. 20; (9.) of fathers, ver. 21; (10.) of servants, ver. 22—25. There is a very striking similarity between this chapter and the fifth and sixth chapters of the epistle to the Ephesians, and a full exposition of the principal subjects adverted to here may be found in the Notes there.

1. *If ye then be risen with Christ.* The apostle in this place evidently founds the argument on what he had said in chap. ii. 12; see Notes on that passage. The argument is, that there was such an union between Christ and his people, that in virtue of *his* death they become dead to sin; that in virtue of *his* resurrection they rise to spiritual life, and that, *therefore*, as Christ now lives in heaven, they should live for heaven, and fix their affections there. ¶ *Seek those things which are above.* That is, seek them as the objects of pursuit and affection; strive to secure them. ¶ *Where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God;* Notes, Mark xvi. 19. The argument

3 For ^b ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

b Ro. 6.2.

here is, that since Christ is there, and since he is the object of our supreme attachment, we should fix our affections on heavenly things, and seek to be prepared to dwell with him.

2. *Set your affections.* Marg., “or *mind*.” Gr. “*think of*”—*φρονεῖτε*. The thoughts should be occupied about the things where Christ now dwells, where our final home is to be, where our great interests are. Since we are raised from the death of sin, and are made to live anew, the great object of our contemplation should be the heavenly world. ¶ *Not on things on the earth.* Wealth, honour, pleasure. Our affections should not be fixed on houses and lands; on scenes of fashion and gaiety; on low and debasing enjoyments.

3. *For ye are dead.* Dead to the world; dead to sin; dead to earthly pleasures. On the meaning of the word *dead*, see Notes on Rom. vi. 2; Eph. ii. 1. The idea of the apostle is, that as Christ became literally *dead* in the tomb, so we, in virtue of our connection with him, have become *dead* to sin, to worldly influences, pleasures, and ambition. Or, in other words, we are to be to them *as if* we were dead, and they had no more influence over us than the things of earth had over him in the grave; Notes, Rom. vi. 2. ¶ *And your life.* There is still *life*. Though *dead* to one class of objects, you are *alive* to others. See the sentiment here expressed, explained at large in the Notes on Gal. ii. 20. ¶ *Is hid with Christ in God.* The language here is taken probably from *treasure* which is “hid” or concealed in a place of security; and the idea is, that eternal life is an invaluable *jewel* or *treasure*, which is laid up with Christ in heaven where God is. There it is safely deposited. It has this security, that it is with the Redeemer, and that he is in the presence of God; and thus nothing can reach it or take it away. It is not left with us, or intrusted to our keeping—for then it might be lost

4 When ^a Christ, *who is* ^b our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

5 Mortify ^c therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

6 For which things' sake the
a 1 John 3.2.

as we might lose an invaluable jewel; or it might be wrested from us; or we might be defrauded of it; but it is now laid up far out of our sight, and far from the reach of all our enemies, and with one who can "keep that which we have committed to him against that day;" 2 Tim. i. 12. Our eternal life, therefore, is as secure as it could possibly be made. The true condition of the Christian is, that he is "dead" to this world, but that he has immortal life in prospect, and that is secure, being in the holy keeping of his Redeemer, now in the presence of God. From this it follows that he should regard himself as living for heaven.

4. *When Christ, who is our life;* Notes, John i. 4; xi. 25. ¶ *Shall appear.* In the day when he shall come to judge the world. ¶ *Then shall ye also appear with him in glory;* 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. Christians shall then be raised from the dead, and ascend with the Redeemer to heaven.

5. *Mortify therefore your members.* Since you are dead to sin and the world, and are to appear with Christ in the glories of his kingdom, subdue every carnal and evil propensity of your nature. The word *mortify* means *to put to death* (Notes, Rom. viii. 13; Gal. v. 24), and the meaning here is that they were entirely to subdue their evil propensities, so that they would have no remains of life; that is, they were not at all to indulge them. The word "*members*" here, refers to the different members of the body—as the seat of evil desires and passions; comp. Notes, Rom. vi. 13. They were wholly to extirpate those evil passions which he specifies as having their seat in the various members of the earthly body. ¶ *Fornication*; Notes, Rom. i. 2. ¶ *Unclean-*

wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.

7 In ^d the which ye also walked sometime, when ye lived in them.

8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

b John 11.25; 14.6. c Ro. 8.13; Ga. 5.24;
Ep. 5.3-6. d Ti. 3.3.

ness; Notes, Rom. i. 24. ¶ *Inordinate affection.* *αἰσες*. Rendered in Rom. i. 26, "*vile affections*;" see Notes on that verse. In 1 Thess. iv. 5, the word is rendered *lust*—which is its meaning here. ¶ *Evil concupiscence.* Evil desires; licentious passions; Rom. i. 24. *Greek.* ¶ *And covetousness, which is idolatry.* It is remarkable that the apostle always ranks *covetousness* with these base and detestable passions. The meaning here is, (1.) that it is a low and debasing passion, like those which he had specified; and (2.) that it secures the affections which properly belong to God, and is, therefore, idolatry. Of all base passions, this is the one that most dethrones God from the soul. See this whole passage more fully explained in the Notes on Eph. v. 3—5.

6. *For which things' sake, &c.;* see Notes, Eph. v. 6, where the same expression occurs.

7. *In the which.* In all which evil passions. ¶ *Ye also walked sometime.* You formerly lived. These were the common vices of the heathen; Notes, Eph. v. 8; 1 Cor. vi. 10, 11; comp. Notes, Rom. i. 24—32.

8. *But now ye also put off all these.* All these which follow, as being also inconsistent with the Christian calling. ¶ *Anger, wrath*; Notes, Eph. iv. 26. ¶ *Malice*; Notes, Eph. iv. 31. ¶ *Blasphemy*; Notes, Matt. ix. 3. The word *here* seems to mean *all* injurious and calumnious speaking—whether against God or man. ¶ *Filthy communication out of your mouth.* Lewd, indecent, and immodest discourse; Notes, Eph. iv. 29. The conversation of the heathen everywhere abounds with this. A pure method of conversation among men is the fruit of Christianity.

9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds ;

10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed ^a in know-

^a Ep. 4.23,24.

^b Ro. 10.12.

9. *Lie not one to another ;* Notes Eph. iv. 25. ¶ *Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deed.* Your former corrupt and evil nature ; Notes, Eph. iv. 22. The reason for putting away lying, stated in Eph. iv. 25, is, that we "are members one of another" — or are brethren. The reason assigned here is, that we have put off the old man with his deeds. The sense is, that *lying* is one of the fruits of sin. It is that which the corrupt nature of man naturally produces ; and when that is put off, then all that that nature produces should be also put off with it. The vice of lying is a universal fruit of sin, and seems to exist everywhere where the gospel does not prevail ; comp. Notes on Titus i. 12. There is, perhaps, no single form of sin that reigns so universally in the heathen world.

10. *Which is renewed in knowledge.* In Eph. iv. 24, it is said that the new man is "created after God in righteousness and true holiness." In this place it is *added* that to the renewed soul *knowledge* is imparted, and it is made in that respect as man was when he was first created. This passage, in connection with Eph. iv. 24, proves that before man fell he was endowed with "righteousness, true holiness, and knowledge." The *knowledge* here referred to, is not the knowledge of *everything*, but the knowledge of *God*. Man was acquainted with his Creator. He resembled him in his capacity for knowledge. He was an intelligent being, and he had an acquaintance with the divine existence and perfections ; comp. Notes on Rom. v. 12. But especially had he that knowledge which is the fear of the Lord ; that knowledge of God which is the result of love. Piety, in the Scriptures, is often represented as the "knowledge" of God ; see Notes on John xvii. 3 ; comp. Notes on Eph. iii. 19. ¶ *After*

ledge after the image of him that created him :

11 Where^b there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free : but Christ is all, and in all.

the image of him that created him. So as to resemble God. In *knowledge* he was made in the likeness of his Maker.

11. *Where there is neither Greek nor Jew ;* see this fully explained in the Notes on Gal. iii. 28. The meaning here is, that all are on a level ; that there is no distinction of nation in the church ; that all are to be regarded and treated as brethren, and that therefore no one should be false to another, or lie to another. ¶ *Circumcision nor uncircumcision.* No one is admitted into that blessed society *because* he is circumcised ; no one is excluded *because* he is uncircumcised. That distinction is unknown, and all are on a level. ¶ *Barbarian.* No one is excluded *because* he is a barbarian, or because he lives among those who are uncivilized, and is unpolished in his manners ; see the word *barbarian* explained in the Notes on Rom. i. 14. ¶ *Scythian.* This word does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. The name *Scythian* is applied in ancient geography to the people who lived on the north and north-east of the Black and Caspian seas, a region stretching indefinitely into the unknown countries of Asia. They occupied the lands now peopled by the Monguls and Tartars. The name was almost synonymous with *barbarian*, for they were regarded as a wild and savage race. The meaning here is, that even such a ferocious and uncivilized people were not excluded from the gospel, but they were as welcome as any other, and were entitled to the same privileges as others. No one was excluded because he belonged to the most rude and uncivilized portion of mankind. ¶ *Bond nor free ;* see Notes, Gal. iii. 28. ¶ *But Christ is all, and in all.* The great thing that constitutes the peculiarity of the church is, that Christ is its Sa-

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering ;

13 Forbearing ^a one another, and forgiving ^b one another, if any man have a quarrel ¹ against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do ye*.

^a Mar. 11. 25; Ep. 4. 2, 32.

^b Mat. 6. 14, 15.

viour, and that all are his friends and followers. Its members lay aside all other distinctions, and are known only as *his* friends. They are not known as Jews and Gentiles; as of this nation or that; as slaves or freemen, but they are known as Christians; distinguished from *all* the rest of mankind as the united friends of the Redeemer; comp. Notes on Gal. iii. 28.

12. *Put on, therefore, as the elect of God.* The fact that you thus belong to one and the same church; that you have been redeemed by the same blood, and chosen by the same grace, and that you are all brethren, should lead you to manifest a spirit of kindness, gentleness, and love. ¶ *Bowels of mercies*; Notes, Phil. ii. 1. ¶ *Kindness*, &c.; see Notes on Eph. iv. 32. The language here is a little different from what it is there, but the sentiment is the same.

13. *Forbearing one another*; Notes, Eph. iv. 2. ¶ *And forgiving one another*; Notes, Matt. vi. 12, 14. ¶ *If any man have a quarrel against any*. Marg., "or complaint." The word here used—*μωμή*—occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means, *fault found, blame, censure*; and here denotes *occasion of complaint*. The idea is, that if another one has given us *just occasion of complaint*, we are to forgive him; that is, we are (1.) to harbour no malice against him; (2.) we are to be ready to do him good as if he had not given us occasion of complaint; (3.) we are to be willing to *declare* that we forgive him when he asks it; and (4.) we are always afterwards to treat him as kindly as if he had not injured us—as *God treats us when he forgives us*; see Notes, Matt. xviii. 21. ¶ *Even as Christ forgive you, so also do ye*. Learn here

14 And above all these things *put on* charity, ^c which is ^d the bond of perfectness.

15 And let the peace ^e of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

¹ or. *complaint*.

^d 1 Co. 13. 2, 8, 13.

^c 1 Pe. 4. 8.

^e Phil. 4. 7.

that Christ has power to forgive sin; comp. Notes, Matt. ix. 6; Acts v. 31. Christ forgave us (1.) *freely*—he did not hesitate or delay when we asked him; (2.) *entirely*—he pardoned all our offences; (3.) *for ever*—he did it so as to remember our sins no more, and to treat us ever onward *as if* we had not sinned. So we should forgive an offending brother.

14. *And above all these things*. Over, or upon all these things; comp. Notes, Eph. vi. 16. ¶ *Charity*. Love. Notes, 1 Cor. xiii. 1. ¶ *Which is the bond of perfectness*. The bond of all perfection; the thing which will unite all other things, and make them complete; comp. the parallel place in Eph. iv. 3. The idea seems to be that love will bind all the other graces fast together, and render the whole system complete. Without love, though there might be other graces and virtues, there would be a want of harmony and compactness in our Christian graces, and this was necessary to unite and complete the whole. There is great beauty in the expression, and it contains most important truth. If it were possible to conceive that the other graces could exist among a Christian people, yet there would be a sad incompleteness, a painful want of harmony and union, if love were not the reigning principle. Nor faith, nor zeal, nor prophecy, nor the power of speaking with the tongue of angels, would answer the purpose. See this sentiment expressed in 1 Cor. xiii., and the effect of love more fully explained in the Notes on that chapter.

15. *And let the peace of God*. The peace which God gives; Notes, Phil. iv. 7. ¶ *Rule in your hearts*. Preside in your hearts; sit as umpire there (*Doddridge*); govern and control you. The word here rendered *rule*—*βασίλευ*

16 Let the word *a* of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms *b* and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

straw—is commonly used in reference to the Olympic and other games. It means, to be a director, or arbiter of the public games; to preside over them and preserve order, and to distribute the prizes to the victors. The meaning here is, that the peace which God gives to the soul is to be to us what the *brabeutes*, or governor at the games was to those who contended there. It is to preside over and govern the mind; to preserve every thing in its place; and to save it from tumult, disorder, and irregularity. The thought is a very beautiful one. The soul is liable to the agitations of passion and excitement—like an assembled multitude of men. It needs something to preside over it, and keep its various faculties in place and order; and nothing is so well fitted to do this as the calm peace which religion gives, a deep sense of the presence of God, the desire and the evidence of his friendship, the hope of his favour, and the belief that he has forgiven all our sins. The “peace of God” will thus calm down every agitated element of the soul; subdue the tumult of passion, and preserve the mind in healthful action and order—as a ruler sways and controls the passions of assembled multitudes of men. ¶ *To the which ye are also called.* To which peace. ¶ *In one body.* To be one body; or to be united as one; Notes, Eph. iv. 4—6. ¶ *And be ye thankful.* For all mercies, and especially for your privileges and hopes as Christians. A spirit of thankfulness, also, would tend much to promote harmony and peace. An ungrateful people is commonly a tumultuous, agitated, restless, and dissatisfied people. Nothing better tends to promote peace and order than gratitude to God for his mercies.

16. Let the word of Christ. The doctrine of Christ. ¶ *Dwell in you richly in all wisdom.* Abundantly, producing the spirit of true wisdom.

17 And whatsoever *c* ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

a Ps. 119. 11.

b Ep. 5. 19.

c 1 Cor. 10. 31.

That doctrine is adapted to make you wise. The meaning is, that they were to lay up the doctrines of the gospel in their hearts; to meditate upon them; to allow them to be their guide, and to endeavour wisely to improve them to the best purpose. ¶ *Teaching and admonishing, &c.*; see this explained in the Notes on Eph. v. 19, 20. The only additional thought here is, that their psalms and hymns were to be regarded as a method of “*teaching*” and “*admonishing*,” that is, they were to be imbued with truth, and to be such as to elevate the mind, and withdraw it from error and sin. Dr. Johnson once said, that if he were allowed to make the ballads of a nation, he cared not who made the laws. It is true in a more important sense that he who is permitted to make the *hymns* of a church, need care little who preaches, or who makes the creed. He will more effectually mould the sentiments of a church than they who preach or make creeds and confessions. Hence, it is indispensable, in order to the preservation of the truth, that the sacred songs of a church should be imbued with sound evangelical sentiment.

17. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed. Whatever ye say or do—whether relating to temporal affairs or to religion. The command here extends to all that we do. ¶ *Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.* Do it all because he requires and commands it, and with a desire to honour him. His authority should be the warrant; his glory the aim of all our actions and words. See the general sentiment here expressed, fully illustrated in the Notes on 1 Cor. x. 31. ¶ *Giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* Through him; or in his name. All our actions are to be accompanied with thanksgiving; Notes, Phil. iv. 6. We are to engage in every duty, not only in the name of

18 Wives, ^a submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

19 Husbands, love *your* wives, and be not bitter against them.

20 Children, ^b obey *your* parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

21 Fathers, provoke not your children to *anger*, lest they be discouraged.

22 Servants, ^c obey in all things *your* masters according to the flesh: not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

^a Ep. 5. 2, &c.; Ti. 2. 4, 5; 1 Pe. 3. 1, &c.
^b Ep. 6. 1, &c. ^c 1 Pe. 2. 18.

Christ, but with thankfulness for strength and reason; for the privilege of acting so that we *may* honour him; and with a grateful remembrance of the mercy of God that gave us such a Saviour to be an example and guide. He is most likely to do his duty well who goes to it with a heart overflowing with gratitude to God for his mercies, and he who is likely to perform his duties with the most cheerful fidelity, is he who has the deepest sense of the divine goodness in providing a Saviour for his lost and ruined soul; see Notes on 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

18. *Wives, submit yourselves, &c.*; Notes on the parallel passage in Eph. v. 21—24.

19. *Husbands, love your wives, &c.*; Notes on Eph. iv. 25—29.

20. *Children, obey your parents, &c.*; Notes on Eph. vi. 1—4.

21. *Fathers, provoke not, &c.*; Notes on Eph. vi. 4. ¶ *Lest they be discouraged.* Lest, by your continually finding fault with them, they should lose all courage, and despair of ever pleasing you. There is much sound sense and practical wisdom in this observation of the apostle. Children should not be *flattered*, but they should be *encouraged*. They should not be so praised as to make them vain and proud, but they should be commended when they do well. The *desire* of praise should not be the principle from which they should be taught to act,

23 And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men;

24 Knowing, that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

CHAPTER IV.

MASTERS, ^d give unto *your* servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

^d Ep. 6. 9, &c.

but they should feel that the approbation of parents is a desirable thing, and when they act so as to deserve that approbation, no injury is done them by their understanding it. He who always finds fault with a child; who is never satisfied with what he does; who scolds and frets and complains, let him do as he will, breaks his spirit, and soon destroys in the delicate texture of his soul all *desire* of doing well. The child in despair soon gives over every effort to please. He becomes sullen, morose, stupid, and indifferent to all the motives that can be presented to him, and becomes to a great extent indifferent as to *what* he does—since all that he does meets with the same reception from the parent.

22—25. *Servants, obey in all things, &c.*; see Notes on Eph. vi. 5—8.

CHAPTER IV.

1. *Masters, give unto your servants, &c.*; see Notes on Eph. vi. 9. ¶ *That which is just and equal.* What they *ought* to have; what is fairly their due. The apostle here, probably, refers to bondmen or slaves, and the propriety of this rule is apparent. Such persons were subject to their masters' control; their time and services were at their disposal, and they could not enforce their just and equal claims by an appeal to the *laws*. They were, therefore, dependent on the equity and kindness of their masters. There can

2 Continue ^a in prayer, and^a Lu. 18. 1.^b Mar. 13. 33.

be no doubt that not a few who were converted to the Christian faith were held to involuntary servitude (see 1 Cor. vii.); and it is as clear that the apostles did not design to make a violent disruption of these bonds, or to lead the slaves to rise and murder their masters; see Notes, 1 Tim. vi. 1—4. But it is equally clear that they meant to represent slavery as a hard and undesirable condition; that they intended to instruct the slaves to embrace the earliest opportunity to be free which was presented (1 Cor. vii. 21); and that they meant to suggest such considerations, and to lay down such principles as would lead masters to emancipate their slaves, and thus ultimately to abolish it. Among these principles are such as these. (1.) That all men were of one and the same blood; Acts xvii. 26. (2.) That they were all redeemed by the same Saviour, and were brethren; 1 Tim. vi. 2; Philem. 16. If redeemed; if they were "brethren;" if they were heirs of glory, they were not "*chattels*," or "*things*;" and how could a Christian conscientiously hold or regard them *as property*? (3.) That they were to "render them that which was *just* and *equal*." What would follow from this if fairly applied? What *would* be *just* and *equal* to a man in those circumstances? Would it not be (a) to compensate him *fairly* for his labour; to furnish him an adequate remuneration for what he had earned? But this would strike a blow at the root of slavery—for one of the elementary principles of it is, that there *must* be "unrequited labour;" that is, *the slave must earn as much more than he receives as will do his part in maintaining the master in idleness*, for it is of the very essence of the system that he is to be maintained in indolence by the slaves which he owns—or just so far as he owns a slave. If he were disposed to earn his own living, he would not need the labour of slaves. No man ever yet became the permanent owner of a slave from *benevolence* to him, or because he desired to pay

watch ^b in the same with thanksgiving;

him fully for his work, or because he meant himself to work in order to maintain his slave in indolence. (b) If a man should in fact render to his slaves "that which is just and equal," would he not restore them to freedom? Have they not been deprived of their liberty by *injustice*, and would not "justice" restore it? What has the *slave* done to forfeit his liberty? If he should make him "equal" in rights to himself, or to what he is by nature, would he not emancipate him? Has he not been reduced to his present condition by withholding that which is "*equal*?" Has he "equal" rights, and "equal" privileges with other *men*? Has he not been cut off from them by *denying* him the equality to which he is entitled in the arrangements of God's government? Can he be held at all without violating all the just notions of *equality*? Though, therefore, it may be true that this passage only enjoins the rendering of that which was "*just*" and "*equal*" in their condition as slaves, yet it contains a *principle* which would "lay the axe at the root" of slavery, and would lead a conscientious Christian to the feeling that his slaves *ought* to be free. These principles actually effected the freedom of slaves in the Roman empire in a few centuries after Christianity was introduced, and they are destined to effect it yet all over the world. ¶ *Knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven*; Notes, Eph. vi. 9.

2. *Continue in prayer*. That is, do not neglect it; observe it at all stated times; maintain the spirit of prayer, and embrace all proper occasions to engage in it; comp. Notes, Luke xviii. 1; Eph. vi. 18; 1 Thess. iv. 17. ¶ *And watch in the same with thanksgiving*. Watch for favourable opportunities; watch that your mind may be in a right frame *when* you pray; and watch, that when your mind *is* in a right frame you may not neglect to pray; see Notes on Eph. vi. 18; Phil. iv. 6.

3. *Withal*. With all the supplica-

3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open ^a unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds :

4 That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

^a 2 Th. 3. 1.

5 Walk in wisdom ^b toward them that are without, redeeming the time

6 Let your speech ^c be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

^b Ps. 90. 12; Ep. 5. 15, 16.

^c Mar. 9. 50.

tions which you offer for other persons and things ; or at the same time that you pray for them. ¶ *Praying also for us*; Notes, Eph. vi. 19, 20; comp. 2 Cor. i. 11; Phil. i. 19; Heb. xiii. 18, 19. ¶ *That God would open to us a door of utterance.* To preach the gospel. He earnestly desired to have liberty to preach the gospel, and asked them to pray that this might be restored to him; see Notes on Eph. vi. 19. ¶ *To speak the mystery of Christ.* Called in Eph. vi. 19, the "mystery of the gospel;" see Notes there. ¶ *For which I also am in bonds.* A prisoner at Rome; Notes, Eph. vi. 20.

4. *That I may make it manifest,* &c.; Notes, Eph. vi. 20.

5. *Walk in wisdom.* That is, conduct uprightly and honestly. Deal with them on the strictest principles of integrity, so that they may not have occasion to reproach the religion which you profess. ¶ *Toward them that are without.* Without the pale of the church, or who are not professing Christians; see Notes on 1 Cor. v. 12. They were surrounded by heathens, as Christians now are by men of the world. The injunction is one that requires us to act with prudence and propriety (i. e. *σοφία*) towards them; and there is perhaps not a more important direction in the New Testament than this. Among the reasons for this are the following : (1.) Men of the world judge of religion, not from the *profession*, but from the *life* of its friends. (2.) They judge of religion, not from preaching, or from books, or from the conduct of its Founder and his apostles, but from what they see in the daily walk and conversation of the members of the church. (3.) They *understand* the nature of religion so well as to

know when its friends are or are not consistent with their profession. (4.) They set a much higher value on honesty and integrity than they do on the doctrines and duties of religion; and if the professed friends of religion are destitute of the principles of truth and honesty, they think they have nothing of any value. They may be very devout on the Sabbath; very regular at prayer-meetings; very strict in the observance of rites and ceremonies—but all these are of little worth in the estimation of the world, unless attended with an upright life. (5.) No professing Christian can possibly do good to others who does not live an upright life. If you have cheated a man out of never so small a sum, it is vain that *you* talk to him about the salvation of his soul; if you have failed to pay him a debt when it was due, or to finish a piece of work when you promised it, or to tell him the exact truth in conversation, it is vain for *you* to endeavour to induce him to be a Christian. He will *feel*, if he does not *say*—and he *might* very properly say—that he wants no religion which will not make a man honest. (6.) No man *will attempt* to do much good to others whose own life is not upright. He will be sensible of the inconsistency, and will feel that he *cannot* do it with any sense of propriety; and the honour of religion, therefore, and the salvation of our fellow-men, demand that in all our intercourse with others, we should lead lives of the strictest integrity. ¶ *Redeeming the time*; Notes, Eph. v. 6.

6. *Let your speech.* Your conversation. In the previous verse the apostle had given a *general* direction that our conduct towards those who are not professing Christians should

7 All ^a my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, *who is* a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord :

8 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might

^a Eph. 6. 21, 22.

be wise and prudent ; he here gives a *particular* direction in regard to our conversation. ¶ *Be always with grace.* Imbued with the spirit of religion. It should be such as religion is fitted to produce ; such as to show that the grace of God is in our hearts. Bloomfield supposes that this means " courteous and agreeable, not morose and melancholy." But though this may be included, and though the rule here laid down would lead to that, it cannot be *all* that is intended. It rather means that our conversation should be such as to show that we are governed by the principles of religion, and that there is unfeigned piety in the heart. This will indeed *make* us mild, courteous, agreeable, and urbane in our conversation ; but it will do more than this. It will imbue our discourse *with the spirit of religion*, so as to show that the soul is under the influence of love to the Redeemer. ¶ *Seasoned with salt.* Salt, among the Greeks, was the emblem of *wit*. Here the meaning seems to be, that our conversation should be seasoned with piety or grace in a way similar to that in which we employ salt in our food. It makes it wholesome and palatable. So with our conversation. If it be not imbued with the spirit of piety, it is flat, insipid, unprofitable, injurious. The spirit of piety will make it what it should be—useful, agreeable, beneficial to mankind. This does not mean that our conversation is to be always, strictly speaking, *religious*—wherever we may be—any more than our food should be mere salt ; but it means that, *whatever* be the topic, the spirit of piety should be diffused through it—as the salt in our food should properly season it all—whatever the article of food may be. ¶ *That ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.* Be

know your estate, and comfort your hearts ;

9 With Onesimus, ^b a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They shall make known unto you all things *which are done* here.

^b Philem. 10.

imbued with the spirit of piety, that you may not utter any thing that would be rash and foolish, but be prepared to answer any one who may question you about your religion in a way that will show that you understand its nature, and that will tend to edification. This remark may be extended farther. It may be understood as meaning also, "be imbued with the spirit of religion, and you will be able to answer any man appropriately on any subject. If he asks you about the evidence or the nature of religion, you will be able to reply to him. If he converses with you on the common topics of the day, you will be able to answer him in a mild, kind, affable spirit. If he asks you of things of which you are ignorant ; if he introduces some topic of science with which you are not acquainted, you will not be ashamed to confess your ignorance, and to seek instruction. If he addresses you in a haughty, insolent, and overbearing manner, you will be able to repress the risings of your temper, and to answer him with gentleness and kindness ;" comp. Luke ii. 46.

7, 8. *All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you ;* see these verses explained in the Notes, Eph. vi. 21, 22.

9. *With Onesimus.* Who had been formerly a servant of Philemon, an inhabitant of Colosse ; see Notes, Philem 10. Onesimus had probably been recently converted ; and Paul felt towards him the warm attachment of a brother ; Philem. 16. In what way he became acquainted with him is unknown. A more full account of him will be found in the Notes on the Epistle to Philemon. ¶ *Who is one of you.* That is, either who is from your city, or one of your own people and nation. It is clear from this, that

10 Aristarchus ^a my fellow-prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, ^b

^a Ac. 27. 2.

^b Ac. 15. 37; 2 Ti. 4. 11.

Onesimus was from Phrygia, and probably from the city of Colosse itself. It would seem also that he was of a higher rank than is designated by the word "*slave*" now. He was, indeed, a "*servant*"—*δούλος*—of Philemon. but would the apostle have addressed the Colossians, and said that he was "*one of them*," if he had occupied precisely the condition which is now denoted by the word *slave*? Would a minister of the gospel now in the Northern States, who should send a letter by a run-away slave to a community of masters at the South, say of him that he was "*one of them*?" Would it be kindly received, or produce a good *impression*, if he did? There is reason, therefore, to think that Onesimus was not a *slave* in the proper sense, but that he might have been a respectable youth, who had bound himself to service for a term of years; comp. Philem. 18. ¶ *They shall make known to you all things which are done here.* Relating to Paul himself and the state of the church in Rome. As the epistle which Paul sent was designed not only for them, but to be a part of the volume of revealed truth, he wrote only those things which would be of permanent interest. Other matters he left for those who carried the epistle to communicate. It would also serve to give Tychicus and Onesimus more respectability in view of the church at Colosse, if he referred the church to them for information on important points.

10. *Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner.* Aristarchus was of Thessalonica, and is mentioned in Acts xix. 29; xx. 4, as Paul's companion in his travels. In Acts xxvii. 2, it is said that he accompanied him in his voyage to Rome, and from the passage before us it appears that he was there imprisoned with him. As he held the same sentiments as Paul, and was united with him in his travels and labours, it was natural that he should be treated in the same manner. He,

sister's son to Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)

together with Gaius, had been seized in the tumult at Ephesus and treated with violence, but he adhered to the apostle in all his troubles, and attended him in all his perils. Nothing further is certainly known of him, though "the Greeks say that he was bishop of Assamea in Syria, and was beheaded with Paul at Rome, under Nero."—*Calmet*. ¶ *And Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas.* John Mark, in relation to whom Paul and Barnabas had formerly disagreed so much as to cause a separation between Barnabas and Paul. The ground of the disagreement was, that Barnabas wished to take him, probably on account of relationship, with them in their travels; Paul was unwilling to take him, because he had, on one occasion, departed from them; Notes, Acts xv. 37—39. They afterwards became reconciled, and Paul mentions Mark here with affection. He sent for him when he sent Tychicus to Ephesus, and it seems that he had come to him in obedience to his request; 2 Tim. iv. 11. Mark had probably become more decided, and Paul did not harbour unkind and unforgiving feelings towards any one. ¶ *Touching whom ye received commandments.* What these directions were, and how they were communicated, whether verbally or by writing, is now unknown. It was, not improbably, on some occasion when Paul was with them. He refers to it here in order that they might know distinctly whom he meant. ¶ *If he come to you, receive him.* In Philem. 24, Mark is mentioned as a "*fellow-labourer*" of Paul. It would seem probable, therefore, that he was not a prisoner. Paul here intimates that he was about to leave Rome, and he enjoins it on the Colossians to receive him kindly. This injunction may have been necessary, as the Colossians may have been aware of the breach between him and Paul, and may have been disposed to regard him with suspicion. Paul retained no malice, and now commend-

11 And Jesus, which is called Justus; who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.

12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth

1 or, striving.

a Ja.5.16.

ed, in the warmest manner, one from whom he was formerly constrained to separate.

11. *And Jesus, who is called Justus.* The name Jesus was probably that which he bore among the Jews. Justus is a Roman name, and was probably that by which he was known among the Romans. It was not uncommon thus to assume another name when one went among a foreign people; comp. Notes, Acts xiii. 9. ¶ *Who are of the circumcision.* Jews, or Jewish Christians. Nothing more is known of Justus. ¶ *These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God.* The word "only" here, probably refers to the fact that they only of all the Jews who were at Rome assisted Paul in his work. Epaphras and Luke were also with him at Rome, and doubtless aided him. ¶ *Which have been a comfort unto me.* The more so because they were Jews. The other Jews in Rome stood aloof, and doubtless endeavoured to augment the trials of the apostle; comp. Acts xxviii. 23—29.

12. *Epaphras; Notes, chap. i. 7.* ¶ *Always labouring fervently for you in prayers.* Marg., "or striving." Gr., agonizing. The word denotes the intense desire which he had for their salvation; his fervent, earnest pleading for their welfare. ¶ *That ye may stand perfect and complete.* Marg., as in Gr., filled. The desire was, that they might maintain their Christian principles unadulterated by the mixture of philosophy and error, and completely perform the will of God in every respect. This is the expression of a pious wish in regard to them, without any affirmation that any had been absolutely perfect,

you, always labouring¹ fervently^a for you in prayers, that ye may stand^b perfect and² complete in all the will of God.

13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis.

b Matt.5.48; He.6.1.

2 or, filled.

or that they would be perfect in this world. It is, however, a command of God that we should be perfect (see Matt. v. 48), and it is the highest wish of benevolence in reference to any one that he may be complete in moral character, and may do all the will of God; comp. Notes on 1 Cor. xiii. 9.

13. *For I bear him record.* Paul had had abundant opportunity to know what were his feelings in regard to these churches. ¶ *A great zeal for you.* A great desire to promote your welfare. ¶ *And them that are in Laodicea.* Laodicea was the capital of Phrygia, and not far from Colosse. There was a church there. See the Introduction, and Notes on ver. 16. ¶ *And them in Hierapolis.* This was also a city in Phrygia, and not far from Laodicea and Colosse. It was situated under a hill to the north, and had on the south a large plain about five miles over. On the south of that plain, and opposite to Hierapolis, was Laodicea, with the river Lycus running between them, nearer to Laodicea than to Hierapolis. This place is now called by the Turks *Pam-buck-Kulasi*, or the *Cotton-Tower*, on account of the white cliffs which lie round about it. It is now utterly forsaken and desolate, but the ruins are so magnificent as to show that it was once one of the most splendid cities in the East. It was celebrated for the hot springs in its vicinity; and on account of the numerous temples erected there, it received the name of *Hierapolis*, or the *holy city*. The principal deity worshipped there was Apollo. See Travels by T. Smith. B.D. 1678. Comp. Notes on ver. 16. From the allusion to it here, it would seem that there were Christians there

14 Luke, ^a the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.

15 Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas,
^a 2 Ti. 4. 10, 11.

in the time of Paul, though there is no mention of a church there. It is nowhere else mentioned in the New Testament.

14. *Luke, the beloved physician.* This was undoubtedly the author of the Gospel which bears his name, and of the Acts of the Apostles. He is mentioned as the travelling companion of Paul in Acts xvii. 10, and appears to have accompanied him afterwards until his imprisonment at Rome see 2 Tim. iv. 11. From ver. 11. of this chapter, it is evident that he was not by birth a Jew, but was probably a proselyte. He is supposed to have been a native of Cyrene, and to have died in Achaia, soon after the martyrdom of Paul, at the advanced age of eighty-four. See Rob. Cal. Art. *Luke*. He is here mentioned as a *physician*, and in his Gospel, and in the Acts, there are incidental evidences that he was acquainted with the science of medicine, and that he observed the events which he has recorded with the eye of one who practised the healing art. It is easy to imagine that the presence of a physician might have been of important service to the apostle Paul in his travels; and that his acquaintance with the art of healing may have aided not a little in the furtherance of the gospel. The miraculous power of healing, possessed by the Saviour and his apostles, contributed much to the success of their preaching; for the power of alleviating pain of body—of restoring to health by miracles, would not only be an evidence of the divine origin of their mission—a credential that they were sent from God, but would dispose those who had received such important benefits to listen attentively to the message of salvation. One of the best qualifications in missionaries in modern times, in order to gain access to the heathen, is an acquaintance with the healing art. ¶ *And Demas.*

and the ^b church which is in his house.

16 And when ^c this epistle is read among you, cause that it be
^b Ro. 16. 5; 1 Co. 16. 19. ^c 1 Th. 5. 27.

Demas is mentioned in two other places, Philem. 24, and 2 Tim. iv. 10. He is here spoken of with commendation as one in whom the apostle had confidence. Afterwards, when troubles thickened, he was not found proof to the trials which threatened him in Rome, and forsook the apostle and went to Thessalonica. He did this under the influence of the "love of this present world," or of life, evidently unwilling to lay down his life in the cause for which Paul suffered; see Notes on 2 Tim. iv. 10. His departure, and that of the others on whom Paul relied in Rome, was one of the severest trials which he was called there to endure; see Notes on 2 Tim. iv. 16.

15. *Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea; Notes, chap. ii. 1. ¶ And Nymphas.* This person is nowhere else mentioned, and nothing more is known of him. ¶ *And the church which is in his house; Notes, Rom. xvi. 5.*

16. *And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans.* Laodicea was near to Colosse, and the church there was evidently exposed to the same dangers from philosophy and false teachers as that at Colosse. The counsels in this epistle, therefore, would be equally applicable to both. In 1 Thess. v. 27, the apostle also charges those to whom that epistle was addressed to see that it be "read unto all the holy brethren." It is evident that the apostles designed that the letters which they addressed to the churches should be read also by others, and should become the permanent source of instruction to the friends of Christ. Laodicea, here referred to, was the seat of one of the "Seven churches" of Asia (Rev. iii. 14); was a city of Phrygia, and was its capital. It was situated on the river Lycus (hence called *Λαοδικεία ἐπὶ Λύκῳ*

read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea.

17 And say to Archippus, ^a Take

^a Philem. 2.

—*Laodicea on the Lycus*) and stood at the southwestern angle of Phrygia. Its early name appears to have been Diospolis, changed subsequently to Rhoas. The name Laodicea was given to it by Antiochus Theos, in honour of his wife Laodice. Under the Romans it became a very flourishing commercial city. It was often damaged by earthquakes, but was restored by the Roman emperors. It is supposed to have been destroyed during the inroad of Timur Leng, A. D. 1402. The ruins are called by the Turks *Eski Hissar*. These ruins, and the ruins of Hierapolis, were visited by Mr. Riggs, an American Missionary, in 1842, who thus speaks of them: "These spots, so interesting to the Christian, are now utterly desolate. The threatening expressed in Rev. iii. 10, has been fulfilled, and Laodicea is but a name. In the midst of one of the finest plains of Asia Minor, it is entirely without inhabitant. Sardis, in like manner, whose church had a name to live, but was dead, is now an utter desolation. Its soil is turned up by the plough, or overgrown by rank weeds: while in Philadelphia, since the day when our Saviour commended those who had there "kept the word of his patience," there has never ceased to be a nominally Christian church. The ruins of Laodicea and Hierapolis are very extensive. The stadium of the former city, and the gymnasia and theatres of both, are the most complete which I have anywhere seen. Hierapolis is remarkable also for the so-called frozen cascades, a natural curiosity, in its kind probably not surpassed for beauty and extent in the world. It consists of a deposit of carbonate of lime, white as the driven snow, assuming, when closely examined, various forms, and covering nearly the whole southern and western declivities of the elevation on which the city was built. It is visible for many miles, and has procured for

^b heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.

18 The salutation ^c by the

^b 1 Ti. 4. 17.

^c 2 Th. 3. 17.

the place the name by which alone Hierapolis is known among the Turks, of the Cotton Castle." ¶ And that ye likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea. In regard to this epistle, see Introduction, § 6.

17. And say to Archippus. Archippus is mentioned also in Philem. 2. He is not elsewhere referred to in the New Testament, and nothing further is known of him. ¶ Take heed to the ministry, &c. The Greek here is, *τὴν διακονίαν*—meaning the office of ministering in divine things; but it is not certain precisely what office he held there. It seems probable from the language which the apostle applies to him—"the ministry"—(comp. Acts i. 17, 25; vi. 4; xx. 24; xxi. 19; Rom. xi. 13; 1 Cor. xii. 5; 2 Cor. iii. 7, 8, 9; iv. 1; v. 18; vi. 3; Eph. iv. 12), that he was not a *deacon*, properly so called, but that he was a preacher of the word. In Philem. 2, he is mentioned by Paul as his "fellow-soldier," and it is evident that the apostle meant to speak of him with honour. There is no evidence, as has been supposed by some, that he intended to imply, by what he said, that he had been remiss in the performance of his duties, but the apostle doubtless meant to encourage him and to excite him to increased ardour and zeal in the work of the Lord; comp. Notes Acts xx. 28. It is always proper to caution even the most faithful and self-denying servants of the Lord to "take heed," or see to it, that they perform their duties with fidelity. The office of the ministry is such, and the temptations to unfaithfulness are so great, that we need constant watchfulness. ¶ That thou fulfil it. That there be nothing wanting, or lacking, in any of the departments of labour which you are called to perform.

18. The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Probably the rest of the epistle was written by an amanuensis,

hand of me Paul. Remember^a
my bonds. Grace *be* with you.
Amen.

^a He. 13. 3, 25.

Written from Rome to the Co-
lossians, by Tychicus and
Onesimus.

As was his custom, Paul affixed his own hand to it in the form of a salutation; comp. Notes, 1 Cor. xvi. 21; 2 Thess. iii. 17. ¶ *Remember my bonds.* Also evidently written by his own hand, to make the injunction more impressive; comp. Notes, Heb. xiii. 3. The meaning is, that they should not forget him in his confine-

ment. They should remember that he was suffering on their account (Notes, chap. i. 24), and that he was entitled to every expression of sympathy and love. ¶ *Grace be with you;* Notes, Rom. xvi. 20.

The subscription to this epistle is undoubtedly correct. See the Introduction.